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THE MOTHER-IN-LAW;

Hee M

OR,

THE ISLE OF RAYS.

A Tale.

BY

EMMA D. E. NEVITT SOUTHWORTH,

AUTHOR OF "RETRIBUTION, OR THE VALE OF SHADOWS;" "SHANNONDALE;" "THE DESERTED WIFE;" ETC. ETC.

> "And underneath that face, like summer oceans,
> Its lip as moveless, and its cheek as clear,
> Slumbers a whirlwind of the heart's emotions,
> Love, hatred, pride, hope, sorrow—all, save fear."
>
> HALLECK.

NEW-YORK:
D. APPLETON & COMPANY, 200 BROADWAY.
1851.

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TO

J. Laurens Henshaw, Esq.,

OF WASHINGTON CITY,

THIS BOOK IS DEDICATED,

AS A TESTIMONIAL OF RESPECT AND AFFECTION,

BY HIS STEP-DAUGHTER,

THE AUTHOR.

PREFACE.

THE following story is founded on facts that occurred in my grandmother's native county. In childhood, I often heard the tale, with mingled emotions of pity, indignation, and wonder; pondering long upon the external circumstances, without comprehending the inner life, the motive power of the story. Nor until lately have I been able to render a reason for the insanities it developed; one of the most striking and incomprehensible of which, was the insignificance of the apparent *cause* which aroused such malignant passion, and spread such wide misery.

Instead of exaggerating, I have softened characters and events; and precisely those points at which my reader may feel inclined to exclaim, "Monstrous! incredible!" will be the most modified in the relation.

It is PRIDE, in its monstrous excess and terrible consequences, that I wish to illustrate in this Tale of Domestic Life.

WASHINGTON CITY,
February 12th, 1851.

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THE

MOTHER-IN-LAW;

OR,

THE ISLE OF RAYS.

BOOK I.

CHAPTER I.

THE ISLE OF RAYS.

She shall dwell in some bright little isle of her own,
By a blue crystal river encircled alone,
Where the dewy leaf waves in the fresh blooming bowers,
And the bee banquets on through the parterres of flowers.

Moore.

I AM about to attempt the description of one of the most sublime and beautiful landscapes in Virginia. The river ———, taking its rise in the Alleghany mountains, flows through the valley of Virginia, and, passing through a defile of the Blue Ridge mountains, falls, roaring and rebounding, from a rocky precipice, and boils howling on, over and between the jagged and pointed rocks sticking up or piled up in its channel. It is a wild, furious, and terrifying scene, inspiring delirium in the nervous beholder—the thundering falls, the mad river foaming between its stupendous banks, and the waters hissing and leaping from their rocky bed like frenzied thoughts from the brain of an enchained maniac. A quarter of a mile below this terrific scene the river declines, and, falling over a second ledge, spreads itself out and opens its arms to encircle a most beautiful island, a very gem of the river. This island, sparkling and glancing in sunshine and water, from the peculiar aspect of its dewy and resplendent beauty, was called, in the poetic language of the Indians, "The Isle of Sunbeams," and "The Isle of Smiles and *Tears.*" *But the first Anglo*-Saxon "invader" of the territory called it "The Isle of Rays." The banks of the river on each side were steep and rocky, and the isle itself arose high from the waters, its base a solid rock covered with a deep, rich soil, and crowned with a luxuriant growth of vegetation. Through the middle of this isle, dividing but not separating it, ran a clear, beautiful creek. This creek was higher than the level of the river. It took its rise in a spring spouting from the rock on the western and higher end of the isle, and flowing, singing through it, ran on to meet the rising sun, and tumbled laughing over the eastern rock in the open arms of the river.

At the time that our story opens, a bridge, light and elegant as the handle of a lady's work-basket, arched above this creek. Although the high cliffs of the isle were on a level with the steep rocks that formed the banks of the river, no bridge had been thrown across, uniting it to the main land. Stone steps were cut in the rocky sides of the isle, at the foot of which a boat was moored. Stone steps were also cut in the steep banks of the river, for the convenience of communication. The northern division of this isle of beauty had been left in all the wild loveliness of nature. The southern division had been cleared up, and laid out in groves, lawns, terraces, gardens, and conservatories. Upon the highest point of this southern division of the isle, stood an elegant mansion, built of white freestone, and surrounded by piazzas, both above and below, and running all around the house. Below these came a terrace covered with green turf, and diversified by shade-trees and by parterres of beautiful flowers. From this, marble steps descended to the lawn. This lawn was traversed by serpentine walks, which, winding over the turf between borders of bright flowers or rows of pine-trees, by the side of a singing brooklet, beneath the shadow of an old oak or elm, around the margin of a clear pond, over the swell of a green hill, or under the shadow of a gray rock, would terminate at some rustic seat, some tasteful arbor, sequestered grove, or dewy dell, with its half-shaded spring, that "now in laughter, now in tears," sprung from the rock, sparkling in the sunlight glimmering through the overhanging leaves; or at the stone steps, at the foot of which lay the little boats; or at the wildly beautiful falls where the glad creek leaped shouting into the river. When the light of the morning sun flashed on the waters of the creek, the falls, and the river, by the contrast of the dark rocks and shadowy woods, the bright waters glanced back to heaven scintillating streams of dazzling light, that gave to the island its appropriate name of "The Isle of Rays." The picturesque island contained in itself about two hundred acres. The estate attached to it—"The Island Estate" —comprised several thousand acres, extending over the north side, and up and down the river. This was the great property of the county, and from the first owner of the soil at the first settlement of the country had descended, undivided, from the father to the eldest son.

The Stuart-Gordons had been settled on The Island Estate for a hundred and fifty years before Margaret, then the sole heiress of the property, was born.

CHAPTER II.

THE HAUGHTY FAMILY.

> Your ancient house? No more. I cannot see
> The wondrous merits of a pedigree;
> Of royal lineage, or a proud display
> Of smoky ancestors in wax and clay.
>
> *Gifford.*

We have come to it at last, reader. The Stuart-Gordons were, not *one* of the first, but positively and incontrovertibly *the* first family in Virginia—if first in princely descent, first in wealth, first in the settlement of the country, and first in pride and pretension, constitute a "first family in Virginia."

The Stuart-Gordons claimed descent, with what truth I know not, from the Royal House of Scotland. For several reasons, I am certainly inclined to the opinion that their claim was not an unfounded one; though most probably the Royal quartering of their family escutcheon was crossed by the *bar-sinister*. One of my own private reasons for believing that the blood of the Stuarts still frets in the veins of the Gordons is this: in all their old family portraits, and in the face of every living member of the house of Stuart-Gordon, may be traced, the serious brooding eye—the beautiful mouth —with that singular blending of strength and weakness—of fire and indolence—of self-will and indecision—of intellect and sensuality—that melancholy, half-spiritual, half-voluptuous, expression of countenance, which distinguished the ill-starred family from the time that their strong Scottish blood was diluted in the marriage of James V. with Mary of Lorraine, and still further reduced in the union of their daughter Mary Stuart with the imbecile Henry, Lord Darnley. Reader, did it ever occur to you to trace the downfall of that Royal House to the degeneracy of its stock from these two unfortunate marriages? If this were the place, or I had the time, I could almost prove it. But to proceed with my story.

Margaret Stuart-Gordon was a great toast in her time, as you may well suppose. In her face, too, were seen the large tender eyes and sweet arched lips of Mary Stuart and Mary of Lorraine. In her twenty-first year she was given in marriage to Captain Henry Cartwright, a young officer who had distinguished himself in the Revolutionary struggle. On the day of marriage, as the sole condition upon which the hand of an heiress of the house could ever be betrothed, he assumed the name of Stuart-Gordon. One only child, a delicate fair-haired boy, blessed this union. To this son, of course, the property would fall in regular entail. When Louis Stuart-Gordon was nearly eighteen years of age, he lost his beautiful and beloved mother, and became the sole and the sufficient consolation of his bereaved and grieving father; and it is at this period that our story opens. Louis at about the age of eighteen, was one of the—no, *not* handsome as a man—but one of the most beautiful youths ever seen —the image of his lovely mother; the same wavy, soft hair; the same large, tender eyes; the same sweet mouth, delicate complexion, and mild expression. His figure was slender; his air, gait, and gesture, graceful; and his manners, gentle. His temperament was poetic. This beautiful isle was his home—his heaven;

here he would wander all day among the shadowy woods or hoary rocks, or sail upon the bright waters. Yet, such was the tenderness of his heart, that, in all his strolling and sailing, he never caught a fish, killed a rabbit, or shot a bird—nay, more—he never wantonly trod upon a worm or crushed a flower beneath his feet.

Between this young poet and his mother had existed the most perfect sympathy; and at her death the being of the boy seemed severed in twain. He mourned her as sincerely as ever son mourned a mother. For a time he had suppressed his own sorrow, and devoted himself to his father; but when, after the lapse of a few weeks, he found the old gentleman recovering his cheerfulness, and even occasionally breaking out into his old mirth and jollity, he withdrew himself, indulging his mood of reverie in the groves and among the rocks of his beloved isle. Sometimes, overcome by the vivid recollection of his dear sister-like mother, he would give way to tears, and, leaning his head upon his hands, let them flow freely. In such moods his father would often find him; and, without intentional unkindness, and with a mistaken notion of arousing him, would exclaim, "Degenerate driveller! you have no manhood. I blush for you, Louis. Idler!" At another time: "Up with you! and go a courting! At your age I was in love with *half* the girls in the country, and had *all* of them in love with me. Up, Louis! Up!"

CHAPTER III.

MONT CRYSTAL.

Crowning a gradual hill the mansion swells
In ancient English grandeur; turrets, spires,
And windows climbing high from base to roof,
In wide and radiant rows, bespeak its birth.
W. Mason.

WHEN one visits a country neighborhood for the first time, with an intention of remaining a few weeks, looking from the windows of the house the first morning, after breakfast, one sees—*there* the square front of some splendid edifice rising in the distance—*here* the sharp roof of some humble cottage sticking up through a near thicket of trees—and indulges in indolent speculation or eager curiosity as to who lives in the palace or who toils in the cottage. Or, *if one takes a walk up the* turnpike, or a *ramble through the forest, one looks* continually on this side and on that, for new developments of scenery and events, with an almost childish love of adventure, and almost infantile curiosity. This propensity is an evergreen of the heart, and does not wither or fade with advancing years. So, condescending reader, if you have come, at my invitation, to visit the Isle of Rays, it will only be a due courtesy to point out to you the most important seats of the neighborhood, preparatory to introducing you to some of the most remarkable neighbors. And first in point of wealth and family is Mont Crystal, the residence of Mrs. Dr. Armstrong. You will please to observe the elegant edifice of white granite, half embosomed in trees, "crowning" the summit of a hill on the bank of the river, visible from the front windows of the Island Lodge. This "palace" had for generations past been the residence of the Armstrongs of Mont Crystal, as their estate was called. This immense estate comprised many thousand acres, and was second in importance only to the celebrated Island Estate, whose southern boundaries *it met.* Please, dear reader, note these facts, for I am telling you a true story, some points of which I wish to fix upon your memory with almost legal precision and distinctness. The Island Estate was *the* great property of the whole Valley of Virginia. The Mont Crystal was the very *next* in point of importance. Their boundary lines *met*—the Island Estate lying on the Island, and *north* of it—the Mont Crystal property south from the banks of the river, that formed the division line. The sole heir of the Island Estate was Louis Stuart-Gordon, an only son, born on the 22d of February, 18—. The sole heiress of the Mont Crystal Estate was Louise Hector Armstrong, the only daughter of the late Dr. Hector Armstrong and Hortense Louise Blackistone, his wife, and born also on the 22d of February, two years later. Louis Stuart-Gordon heired his estate in right of his mother—Louise Hector Armstrong in right of her father. The family on the Isle consisted of a father and son—the family at Mont Crystal of a mother and daughter, with the governess of the latter.

Sprung from one of the haughtiest families in Virginia, and claiming descent from one of the most ancient and noblest houses in the north of England, Hortense Louise Blackistone had in very haughtiness remained unmarried until she had nearly reached her thirtieth year, her proud, cold heart untouched, while her splendid style of beauty had drawn around her crowds of admirers. Her hand reserved for the highest and haughtiest aspirant, was at last bestowed upon Dr. Hector Armstrong, a young practitioner of medicine, for years a suitor to the "proud ladye," but who might have sued in vain, had not the death of his elder brother left him sole heir to the great Mont Crystal property, and so Miss Blackistone became Mrs. Armstrong, and Dr. Armstrong bore his bride away to the "palace," as it was called in the neighborhood. This was about two years from the time that Margaret Stuart-Gordon was given in marriage to Captain Henry Cartwright, afterwards General Stuart-Gordon. Never was a greater misnomer than that of Dr. Hector Armstrong—for he never was known to "hector" over any body or thing, nor was he strong anywhere, in mind or body. He was a small, slight, fair-skinned, red-headed, blue-eyed manikin, whom people, when they wished to praise him, called "nice," "amiable," "harmless," "mild," "inoffensive," and other such *offensive* epithets. Soon after his coming into his property and his marriage, which happened about the same time, his change of fortune and of life, and his indolence of habits, led him to abandon his profession, and from that time he began to sink into privacy, into insignificance, into nonenity, while Mrs. Hector Armstrong, whose name was no misnomer, flourished "like a green bay-tree"—just as you have seen a weak plant shrivel, and shrink, and wilt down by the side of one of stronger, hardier growth, until it is dead.

Thus Dr. Hector Armstrong's individuality and dignity were absorbed. The very house was called—not Dr. Armstrong's—but *Mrs.* Dr. Armstrong's. This was not intentional on the part of the lady. She was too really proud not to wish to throw over her imbecile "lord and master" the *prestige* of power and dignity—but some how or other the purple would not hang naturally or gracefully about the shoulders of the little gentleman, and so it fell out quite inevitably that the neighborhood, as well as the household, looked up, as the head of the family, to *Mrs.* Hector Armstrong. It was in the second year of their marriage that their only child, a daughter, was born, and named, as is frequently the custom in Virginia, after both parents, Louise Hector. This child almost entirely resembled her father—scarcely a single trait of her mother's face, form, or character, could be traced in her. When Louise was about four years of age, Dr. Hector Armstrong died, leaving the haughty lady in the undisputed possession of their estate and their daughter.

Can you conceive, reader, a mother's love for *her only child—being* a *passion* deep, intense, absorbing, yet selfish, jealous, and exacting? *This* was the affection, if it deserved the name, that Hortense Armstrong cherished for her daughter. She had been jealous of the child's affection for her own father, jealous of her attachment to her mulatto nurse, though the state the lady habitually kept continually left the gentle little child in charge of her attendants. But after the death of her father, and after the entrance of Louise upon her fifth year, the mother took her more particularly under her own charge—conducting her education herself; the whole bent of this education was to one object—the entire subjugation of the will of Louise to that of herself, to gain a life-long ascendency over the heart and mind of the child, and thereby the disposal of her destiny. Not only did she require from her daughter the implicit obedience claimed by and ceded to parents by every law, human and divine, but she aspired to bring down the intellect and affections, the very mind and spirit of her child into absolute subjection to her will. Not a "reasonable," but an unquestioning submission she demanded. She would have wielded Louise at her will, as she would wield her own hand or foot. Much as she loved Louise, after her own haughty and condescending manner, it is not to be denied that she appeared to regard her child—her *own* child, as she called her—somewhat in the light of a chattel. Was she not her *own* child? She was very proud of her. Was not she heiress to Mont Crystal, a valuable appendage? In verity she *was* extremely proud of her young daughter, as she was of her palace home, her splendid equipages, and her troop of menials.

I said her education was directed all to this point—the subjection of her will to that of her mother—and, further, the utter annihilation of her mental and moral individuality and responsibility. Filial love, veneration, and obedience, inculcated upon her mind as the highest religion—"Honor thy father and thy mother, that thy days may be long in the land that the Lord thy God hath given thee." "The eye that mocketh at his father, and despiseth to obey his mother, the ravens of the valley shall pick it out, and the young eagles shall eat it." These and similar texts of Scripture were copied out and given to Louise to be committed to memory. This was the creed impressed upon the docile mind of the infant. Had its *object* been a righteous one, this, as far as it went, would have been very commendable; nothing is certainly more reasonable and proper than the exaction of this obedience from children to the parents God has placed as Providences over them; and nothing is more beautiful than the graceful yielding of this affectionate and reverential submission. But in this case the object was *not* righteous, and reason and religion were *per*verted and *in*verted, and texts of Scripture garbled, to attain an ascendency over the child's mind, for any purpose of good or *evil* that might *seem* good in the eyes of the not over-scrupulous mother. By nature and temperament, Louise was gentle and impressible. What wonder, that, in her mother's hands, she should have seemed like clay in the hands of the potter—that she should have become moulded exactly to her will. Nor is it any wonder that, while fearing her awful mother so much, Louise should have loved her with a devotion amounting to superstitious idolatry; for it is ever thus, that most austere and severe parents have the most gentle and affectionate children, even as harshest, sternest husbands have the most tender and submissive wives; as if some gentle natures were created for the amelioration of the harsher, and formed so as to draw from their self-devotion their largest happiness.

When Louise Armstrong was about twelve years of age, a governess was engaged to finish her education—that is, to instruct her in the modern languages, music, drawing, embroidery, &c., Mrs. Armstrong haughtily objecting to the "mixed" society of boarding-schools on the one hand, and feeling a great disinclination to lose the company, or cede over the control of her daughter on the other. Governesses were not so plenty twenty years ago as at present, or she would never have been driven to the necessity of employing a "wild Irish girl" to cultivate the mind, and perfect the manners of her only child, the beauty and the heiress. The governess, Miss O'Riley, as the haughty lady of Mont Crystal addressed her—Britannia O'Riley, as she wrote herself—Brighty, as, for her bright beauty and brilliant wit and humor, her intimate friends christened her, was a Washington girl of Hibernian parentage; she was about twenty-five years of age at the time our story opens, of medium height, moderately full figure, black eyes and hair, and dark complexion, features irregular, forehead broad and full, eyebrows slender and black, arched towards the nose, and elevated towards the temples, bright, piercing eyes, *nez retroussé*, and lips full, crimson, and quivering, formed *the tout ensemble* of a countenance irresistibly charming in its sparkling piquancy.

Such was the parlor circle of the family of Mont Crystal. Let me introduce you.

CHAPTER IV.

THE DRAWING-ROOM AT MONT CRYSTAL.

I know the spot;
The curtain'd windows half exclude the light,
Yet eager still to make their way,
A thousand elfin sunbeams bright,
Glittering about the carpet play.
But what attracts you chiefly there
Is one who in a cushion'd rocking-chair,
Doth sit and read.

Mrs. A. M. Wells.

DEAR reader, your story-tellers, some of them, have an inveterate propensity to describe comfortable firesides, scenes of which they have occasionally caught a glimpse. It is perhaps an effort of the soul to escape the chill realities of lodgings in rented houses, by taking refuge in the homes of memory, or of imagination. One can *almost*

"Cloy the hungry edge of appetite,
By bare imagination of a feast!"

It is the decline of a cold, bright winter's day. Follow me into a vast, luxurious drawing-room, in which the crimson shadows predominate—through which a glowing crimson gloom prevails, brightly streaked by the rays of the setting sun glancing through the curtains in slanting streams of golden light, kindling into refulgence the various ornaments of crystal or gilding, about the room, and striking sparks of fire from a diamond ring upon the most beautiful white hand you ever saw—a hand that held a little Psyche pocket-mirror, and that belonged to a lady, the rest of whose person was hidden in the deep recesses of the velvet chair. Walk around in front of her chair, and take a view of her—she will not see you, even if you were not invisible, as all subjects of imagination are in the scenes they visit, so absorbed is she in her occupation. And what is her occupation in that still, warm, bright scene? Contemplating her own beauty—gazing dreamingly, lovingly, into her own languishing eyes. There is no expression of gratified vanity on that bright countenance—there was the emotion, half intellectual, half sensual, of the artist soul in love with its own beautiful incarnation.

Yes, Britannia O'Riley felt that she was *very* beautiful, and it made her happy. When at night she thanked God for "health, friends, and raiment," she thanked him also with an earnest sincerity for the gift of beauty. It was a luxury in a quiet room, at the still twilight hour, to sit in the deep chair, and smile dreamingly in her own eyes—yet she was not vain. Vanity is a compound of two elements, self-conceit and desire of praise. Now, Britannia O'Riley had a just self-appreciation, and that excluded all anxious thought of the admiration of others, at least of those around her.

But Britannia knew that her person was beautiful, and half worshipped it accordingly. You will condemn her for it! Well, so be it! I am not holding Britannia up for a model of excellence, I am describing her as she was. You will condemn, but you will not *wonder* at her. Observe her as she sits in that deep chair—note her Galwaygian style of features and complexion—that matchless Hibernia-Spanish beauty, indigenous nowhere but to the west coast of Ireland. The full carnation lips—the cheeks of bright carnation, shading softly off into the faintest rose tint, and lost in the snowy temples and forehead, in contrast with the slender, arched jet-black eyebrows—the radiant blue-black eyes, the shining bands of blue-black hair. Britannia must have been infatuated with the *piquante* beauty of this tint, for her favorite dress was a rich blue-black figured satin, fitting in exquisite perfection her finely-developed form, relieved here and there by costly and sparkling gems. Her whole costume was rich and rare, and her bearing gently proud—and she was nothing but a poor governess. Of course, she expended nearly all of her moderate salary in dress. What did she do that for? you may inquire. Did she hope to get a husband among the young Virginian aristocrats? No, indeed! In haughty England, it is true that once in a long time a gentleman may fall in love with and marry some beautiful governess, but in Virginia, such a republican proceeding is unheard of—impossible! I do not know that it ever occurs to a young Virginia planter that a governess is a woman, or any thing else but a teaching instrument in the morning; a parlor ornament in the evening. *A parlor ornament*—I am sorry to say—by the way—that in the South governesses are valued more for dress, style, manner, and other *drawing-room accomplishments*, than for sound *and solid qualities of* brain or heart. As a *general thing, Virginians* are rather proud of stylish governesses, as elegant appendages to their household. It is a preference quite opposite to the English preference, that for fear of *mésalliance* selects old and plain teachers. The haughtier Virginians never dream of such a chance as one of their race wishing to marry a *salaried* girl. Britannia knew and felt this, and refined, intellectual, and accomplished, as she was, cared as little for it as you care for the pride of a South Sea prince.

While we have been talking, the slanting rays of the setting sun, after having glided half around the walls, have gradually withdrawn themselves. And twilight has deepened into night. And the light that glows through the crimson drawing-room comes now from the solid mass of burning coal within the large glittering steel grate, though to a poet's fancy Britannia is brilliantly beautiful enough to light up a dark room. No wonder her young friends called her "Brighty." Brighty could no longer make love to her own beautiful face, because it was no longer an object of beauty—the red glare striking up from the grate reversing all its shadows, and the order of nature at the same time, which is to have the light fall *down*, threw the charming features into chaos. So Britannia, released from the toil and care of the day, and losing the pleasure of dallying with her own eyes, sank into the sweet repose invited by the quiet luxury of the twilight room, every nerve and sense at rest, and her free thoughts lazily roving whither they would. If no love had brightened the path of Britannia's life, no sorrow had clouded it, no care had roughened it. Left an orphan in the charge of a countryman of her father's at an early age, with barely sufficient money to educate her for a teacher, Britannia O'Riley had been sent to a boarding-school, which she had left to take her present place in Mrs. Armstrong's house, a situation that she had held for nearly three years, with some toil, some vexation, but much fun. Britannia had not a "bit of a brogue," yet she was Irish enough to assume it in its richest, deepest music, at an instant's impulse—and she was malicious enough to punish the pride of her patroness by falling into it upon great state occasions. *There* her malice stopped—she loved ease, beauty, and pleasant thoughts too well to recollect any thing disagreeable after the day of tyranny was over; and this was her hour of luxury and dreaming. As I said, she had neither griefs nor joys to remember, or any very probable good or bad fortune to anticipate, so her thoughts strayed into the regions of ideality. She had not lived long enough, suffered deeply enough, or she was not intellectual and refined enough, to sufficiently appreciate and enjoy music and poetry. She had an artist soul, and loved beauty, even her own beauty; but it was the painter artist, not the music artist—hers, poetry of form, and not the poetry of sound and measure—the harmony of coloring, not the lights and shades of music. And this artist instinct involuntarily directed every thing she did, her dress, attitude, and every gesture and motion. One of poor Brighty's daily vexations was the appearance of Mrs. Armstrong's huge chased silver tea-urn, with its ugly shape, its disproportionate mouth and spigot.

It was this love of the beautiful in form and color that led Brighty into the extravagances of a *recherché* toilet, and that sent her into the crimson lights and shadows of the drawing-room, as it always looked in the evening, to dream over her romances. She was fain to enliven the tedium of her life and fill the vacuity of her thoughts with novel reading, which was quite a passion with her, but, to do Britannia justice, nothing silly or commonplace in that line was acceptable to her. Sir Walter Scott's novels and metrical romances were just in course of publication, and Brighty, like ten thousand of others, would finish one and wait for another with a whetted appetite. Shakspeare was her god-poet, though she could not rise with him to his highest conceptions. She reproduced with her pencil and brush all her favorite Shaksperean and Waverley heroes, heroines, and landscapes; and her chamber was hung around with her specimens of art. Helena in Shakspeare, Jeannie Deans in Scott, were favorites, and *not* Beatrice or Die Vernon, as you would at first thought suppose Brighty would prefer. She loved and admired deeper-toned characters than her own. This was perhaps natural—we are most likely attracted by our opposites, and value most in others those good or great points of character in which we are deficient.

Do not despise Brighty because she was not blind to her own beauty. I am afraid you will; yet, as I am telling a true story, I am determined, for once, to draw characters exactly as they are, without softening or heightening a defect or grace. I hasten to tell you one good trait of Britannia O'Riley. One pleasure she enjoyed more than that of admiring herself, *more than reading* romances, or *reproducing with her pencil* their scenes, more than pulling the ears of Mrs. Armstrong's pride even—and that was to supply Susan Somerville with plenty of good reading, and to sympathize heartily with her enjoyment of it. Perhaps had there been an opportunity, her benevolence would have taken a more legitimate and utilitarian tone. But there was not. The country was too new, too rich, and too sparsely settled, to have many poor or suffering candidates for charity. We have taken up too much time with Brighty, but in that fault we have plenty of company. Few came into her presence, or sat down by her side, without losing more time than they at first intended. Brighty's hour of twilight musing in the deep chair by the coal-fire was short. A servant in livery entered, and, by lighting the lamps, brought out all the flashing, dazzling splendor of the rather gaudily magnificent drawing-room, and thereby destroyed its charm for a poet-artist like Brighty. The room was only beautiful to her in twilight, or in subdued glowing firelight gloom. As soon as the servant had retired at one door, the other was thrown open, and Mrs. Armstrong sailed majestically in, accompanied by her daughter.

Mrs. Armstrong was about forty-five years of age. She was a woman of majestic presence—very tall, very full formed—with the erect carriage, stately step, and assured manner that expressed conscious power, indomitable will, and accustomed sway. Her features were strongly marked—her forehead square and broad; her nose a high aquiline; her chin and cheeks full and round; her lips firmly set; her complexion opaque white; her eyes were dark gray—bright, cold, and hard; her eyebrows were square, heavy, and black; her hair was glossy, jet-black, and braided in large, heavy braids down her round, full, elastic cheeks, and plaited in a thick plait, wound around the back of her head, and confined by a comb. She usually wore a black satin dress, and, as was customary at that day, a light and elegant turban. The whole expression of her countenance, tone, and manner, was high and noble, but it was the nobility of pride, not of goodness.

The daughter was a beautiful girl of fifteen summers, with a small and delicate figure, fair hair, fair skin, and blue eyes, and that look of timidity and deprecation that some oppressed children wear.

Miss O'Riley arose, and curtesying, left the ample chair to the lady, who, with a slight acknowledgment, slowly sunk into it, motioning her daughter to take the footstool at her feet.

Miss O'Riley, (we must be formal in the presence of the proud lady,) Miss O'Riley found a seat on a sofa near at hand.

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CHAPTER V.

THE MOTHER AND DAUGHTER.

She has a cool, collected look,
As if her pulses beat by book;
A measured tone, a cold reply,
A management of voice and eye,
A calm, possessed, authentic air,
That leaves no hope of mercy there.
Willis.

Face and figure of a child,
Though too sad, you think, and tender,
For the childhood you would lend her,
Yet child, simple, undefiled,
Mute, obedient, waiting still,
On the turnings of your will.
Mrs. Browning.

"ARE you advised, Miss O'Riley, of the manner in which your pupil was engaged at this hour last evening?"

There was a deliberate arrogance in the manner of the lofty lady, that called the quick, Irish blood of Britannia to her brow. For an answer she turned her eyes on Louise, who, sitting at her mother's feet, looked pale and nervous.

"I am very sorry, Brighty—" commenced Louise, with tears in her eyes.

"Attend to *me*, if you please, Miss O'Riley; and, my daughter! be silent when your mother is speaking, and *when* you speak, address your governess as I do, remembering that we only call our *equals* by their given names. Now, Miss O'Riley, if your convenience serves, I shall be obliged by your favoring me with a reply to my question. Are you, or rather, *were* you at the time advised of the manner in which your pupil was engaged at this hour last evening?"

"Haven't the slightest idee," said Brighty, with an affected brogue, and a delightful nonchalance. Then quickly blaming herself for impertinence to a lady many years her senior, she immediately changed her tone, and replied, "No, madam, I am not. At the close of her evening lessons, I conducted her to your chamber door, saw her enter, and did not encounter her again until we met at ten. I hope that in the interval she fell into no error."

"Into a very grave error, Miss O'Riley; into an idle conversation with young Stuart-Gordon, in the grove below the front court-yard. I fortunately saw her from an upper window, and dispatched her maid to recall her to her duty, and to my side," replied the lady, looking with cold displeasure upon the governess.

"I presumed that Louise had not left your side, madam."

"You *presumed* that *Louise* had not left my side! I should feel favored if you would be *sure* that *Miss Armstrong* is always in a position becoming my daughter," spoke the lady haughtily; then graciously, "That is all I have to say, Miss O'Riley! you will oblige me by bearing my expressed wishes in mind; and now, if you please, we will change the subject of conversation."

"But that is not all *I* have to say, Mrs. Armstrong, and if I might venture to differ with you, madam, and offer my own views on the subject, I should say that 'Miss Armstrong' is followed, watched, guided, and guarded, in short, like the world, 'governed too much.' I think—and believe me, that it is with the most earnest desire of Miss Armstrong's welfare—"

"My daughter," interrupted the lady, turning blandly to Louise, "withdraw from the room; go into my chamber, you will find a fire already lighted there, and stay until I recall you."

Louise arose, and lifting her mother's hand reverently to her lips, courtesied, and left the room.

"Proceed, Miss O'Riley, with what you were saying; and remember that in future you will infinitely oblige me by not honoring me with advice in the presence of Miss Armstrong. Proceed; any suggestion you may have to make relative to your pupil's welfare, shall be heard. I myself fancy that Miss Armstrong grows thin; that, however, may be adolescence. Nevertheless, I cannot forget that her father died of consumption, nor can I close my eyes to the fact that she inherits his delicacy of organization. I am waiting your reply, Miss O'Riley."

"To be frank with you, then, Mrs. Armstrong, I think that Louise—I beg pardon—*Miss Armstrong does* grow thin. I think that she is worried with too much care—too much culture—and that it is killing her."

"I do not understand you, Miss O'Riley."

"Madam, you have seen a pet killed with kindness, before now, have you not?"

"You are still more incomprehensible, Miss O'Riley."

"Mrs. Armstrong, have you never, in your childhood, handled, petted, and nursed a plump young kitten, until it grew thin and scrawny—have you never nursed one to death, in short?—*I* have."

"You grow enigmatical, Miss O'Riley; I consult you upon the subject of your pupil's health, and you talk to me of kittens; pray, explain yourself," said the lady, haughtily.

"I will," said Brighty, rising and settling the folds of her blue-black satin; your daughter is attended to—worried—hurried too much—she wants rest—repose—Mrs. Armstrong; she wants a heart and mind at ease; she wants more freedom; she is afraid to stir hand or foot; to speak—to think—to *feel*—lest she should give her mother pain or displeasure."

"That is her religion," said the lady, coolly. "Miss Armstrong, I am happy to say, is an example of filial piety. I repeat it, that is her religion."

"It is her superstition."

"You will please to remember you are addressing *me*, Miss O'Riley."

"And it is in full consciousness of that, that I say, Mrs. Armstrong, that your system of education degrades, debases, enslaves, yes, *destroys* your daughter!—and that if it be continued, in two years from this Louise will be an irreclaimable idiot."

"You are speaking of Miss Armstrong," said the lady, white with anger, but speaking steadily.

"I know it; and I repeat, that unless a different course is taken, in two years Miss Armstrong, of Mont Crystal, will be an idiot slave!"

Brighty's eyes were blazing.

A long pause ensued. It was broken by the measured tones of Mrs. Armstrong, saying—

"I am surprised that Miss O'Riley leaves me the pain of suggesting to her the propriety of retiring from my presence; I should have supposed that after her polite speech she would at least have had the good taste to anticipate me by doing so."

Brighty arose and stood before her patron—

"Mrs. Armstrong, if I were really malicious, as well as high-spirited, I should obey you, and leave the room; yes, I should go beyond orders, and leave the *house;* but such is not the case; my Irish blood takes fire very quickly, but it is a blaze of shavings; when I am struck, I *strike back immediately*, and *then forgive my antagonist; I would not forgive on* any other terms; when people are arrogant to me, I am capable of being insulting to them; and yet, Mrs. Armstrong, I would not be so to you; I respect your years more than your rank or—"

She was about to inadvertently add "your character," but she bit her tongue in time.

All this time Mrs. Armstrong had sat up erect, cold, and silent; neither deigning to speak or look at the bright earnest girl standing before her. Britannia continued—

"If I *spoke* strongly, Mrs. Armstrong, it was because I *felt* strongly; because I wished to rouse your attention to a subject of which I have before spoken, with *more* moderation and *less* effect; because I think that if many parents fall into the error of over *laxity*, a few make the opposite mistake of too great *stringency;* because you make me think that ladies of your age may *sometimes* forget the days, and consequently the wants of their own youth, and so be unable to enter into and understand the necessities of their children; I am nearer the age of Louise, and have a clearer recollection of what one's little necessities are at fifteen."

"Proceed, Miss O'Riley."

"I should say that Miss Armstrong requires exercise, amusement, excitement. Young girls of her age have usually high spirits. She is congealing into apathy—into death, perhaps; to rouse her, she requires that the frozen springs of her life-blood be thawed; let her mingle freely with those of her own age and sex, at least, that she may feel her youth—*a little.*"

"And how is that to be effected, if I may inquire, Miss O'Riley? Our neighborhood is not so thickly settled with young people—least of all with such as I should introduce to Miss Armstrong."

"Still there are some."

"Who, pray, Miss O'Riley?"

"There is Susan Somerville."

"A young lady with whom I would never permit Miss Armstrong to become intimate."

"May I ask why?"

"Her mother's *will* is a sufficient reply, Miss O'Riley. I am not called upon to sit in judgment upon Miss Somerville, nor am I addicted to gratuitous censoriousness."

"Then there is Gertrude Lion."

"The 'Gerfalcon,' as she is called, partly from her name, partly from her nature; no, she has earned a sobriquet that at once excludes her from Miss Armstrong's acquaintance."

A pause followed, broken, as before, by the lady of the house.

"Have you any thing further to suggest, Miss O'Riley?"

Britannia smiled, as she murmured—

"There is Zoe."

Here the lady quickly interrupted her with—

"Not to be thought of for a moment! By no means."

"Then I am at the last of my invention, I believe—stay! yes—there is a dancing-school about to be established at 'Prince of Wales.' Why not send Louise there; it will be an amusement for her; they will have practising quadrilles twice a week; I will attend her there?"

"No doubt of it," dryly remarked the lady, "but Miss Armstrong's mother has no idea of mixing her up with these dances, and having her hand sullied by the contact of she knows not whom."

"Then pack her up in a nice rosewood coffin, lined with white satin, and entomb her at once," *thought* Brighty, but she said nothing.

The supper-bell now rang, and Mrs. Armstrong dispatching a servant to summon her daughter, led the way to the supper-room.

Louise entered the supper-room, pale and tearful, and going up softly to her mother's side, she whispered low—

"Dearest mother, pray tell me again that you forgive me; I cannot rest, I cannot be satisfied, I do not feel as if you *had quite* forgiven me."

"Do not whisper in company, my daughter; and, beyond all, do not doubt your mother's word. She has told you that she had forgiven your indiscretion, great as it was; let that suffice; now be seated," said the lady, coldly.

Tortured by that strange, yet not impossible incident, the simultaneous attraction and repulsion that only the very strong can exercise, only the very sensitive feel, namely, the attraction of flesh and blood—the repulsion of word and manner—broken between her wish to throw herself upon her mother's bosom and the fear of giving displeasure, Louise "stifling the mighty hunger of the heart," sank coldly, dejectedly, into her seat. Strange as it may seem, this coldness in repelling and repressing did but deepen, intensify, and concentrate her filial love; for Louise idolized her handsome, majestic mother, in her regal, matron beauty. *She craved her embrace* the more ardently, that *she seemed ever on the verge*, yet never re*ceived it. She went to sleep, to dream of* caressing freely the beautiful mother, whose jewelled fingers she mighly barely raise to her lips. Louise was sickening of a starved heart. A little more coldness, a little more frost, and her affections would have been killed. Mrs. Armstrong knew exactly how far to go, when to stop. Never did scheming woman manœuvre to retain her lover's affections with more art than did this lady to confirm her influence over her only child. Every emotion, and with some natures every affection, is wasted in proportion to its manifestation. Mrs. Armstrong understood this perfectly, and accordingly gently repelled her child. "*My daughter*," was pronounced in the softest key, with the most gentle inflection of voice, and with a look of tenderness, exciting a wish for the embrace that was never yielded—a want that gnawed deeper for being repressed. Women instinctively understand this principle, and women of the world practise it; and up to a certain degree—a degree to be calculated by the temperament of the subject—they repulse the advances of the man whose affections they wish *ultimately* to secure. It is strange that a *mother* should have acted so to her only child; something new under the sun—incomprehensible—incredible, if, in this case, it were not known to be a fact. Upon this evening, however, Mrs. Armstrong watched her daughter with some anxiety; observed that, besides her paleness, thinness, tearfulness, and trembling, she scarcely tasted food, and the lady resolved to take some immediate measures for the restoration of her health and cheerfulness. These very measures conspired to form the crisis of her child's destiny. The circumstance which had given so much offence to the haughty mistress of Mont Crystal and drawn upon the head of Miss O'Riley such a severe rebuke was simply this, one day Loui had crossed the river in the little boat, and, ascending the stone steps that led up the bank, wandered down a deep forest path, into a shady dell. Sitting down under the trees, he fell into a reverie that was broken by a clear, soft, lute-like voice, saying, near him,

"Oh! Louis, I meet you at last. I wanted to come to you so much, dear Louis, to tell you how I suffer with you—how I sorrow for you; but my mother says that it is no longer proper for us to visit you at the Isle, now that there is nobody to receive us. But you know, Louis, do you not, that I wept to come to you?"

"Yes, dear Louise, I knew, if permitted, you would have come."

"You know it," said she. "Well, Louis, now I only stopped to say that, and bid you good-by; for mother would not like my stopping here to talk, and I must not do what mother does not think right, you know."

"How, Louise, would you leave me so soon, long as it has been since I have had the happiness of seeing you?" inquired the youth, taking her hand and looking deprecatingly into her face. She drew her hand half out gently, while an expression of perplexity and distress traversed her countenance. "Sit down upon this bank, and let us have a chat, Louise?"

"Oh, no! no!" exclaimed the maiden, now quite withdrawing her hand; "mother says it is not right, mother says it is not proper—"

"What is not right? What is not proper, Louise? Your sitting on a bank and talking with me? Was that it?"

"Oh! no, no! I do not mean that mother said *that*, but she *would* say it if she knew it."

"Dear Louise!—*me*—your old school-fellow!"

"No, not you *particularly*, Louis, but any one. Mother says—"

Here an expression of displeasure, almost amounting to aversion, crossed the countenance of the young man, and arrested the speech of the maiden.

Presently she said—

"Do not be displeased with me, Louis; it is so distressing to me, dear Louis."

"Displeased with *you*, Louise?"

"Well, with *my mother*, then; for it is equally painful to me, Louis. But now, indeed, I must hasten away. Good evening, Louis. Oh! you can come over to see—*mother* soon, can you not?"

"Perhaps so; but *do not* leave me yet!" pleaded the youth, still holding her recovered hand.

"Oh! Louis, would you get me a scolding?" exclaimed the trembling child, while a spasm of petulance contracted her delicately beautiful face.

"Certainly not, Louise," replied the young man, gravely dropping her hand.

"Miss Armstrong, your mother wants you," said a voice through the trees; and the maiden, starting, trembling, and growing pale, exclaimed—

"I am missed; mother has sent Kate after me; good-by, dear Louis," pressed his hand hastily, and disappeared in the trees, just as a tall mulatto woman emerged from them to meet her.

With a very sedate brow, Louis Stuart-don retraced his steps to the water's edge, descended the stone stairs, got into the boat, and rowed back to The Isle.

Louis sauntered abstractedly towards the house, and entered it, passing in at the central door under the piazza, and, opening another door on his left, admitted himself into the family sitting-room.

CHAPTER VI.

THE OLD WAINSCOTED HALL.

A dreamy aspect doth the parlor wear,
Pictures and busts and books, not flowers,
But a warm hearth where one may doze for hours,
Nor note the minutes in their lazy flight,
Nor ever think to count them as they go.
Mrs. A. M. Wells.

It was a room some twenty feet square, with two very tall windows looking out upon the piazza, and commanding a view of the sloping terrace and ornamented grounds in front, of the dividing river and the opposite shore, with a stately white villa crowning the hill, (but of that more anon.) Now turn away from the window, and look within. The dark and highly varnished oak-panelled walls gave that substantial and finished appearance—that inexpressible air of tightness, snugness, warmth, and comfort, that nothing else can so well confer upon a room. These wainscoted walls were ornamented by numerous fine, large engravings in massive gilt frames. The fireplace stood, as I said, in the corner. It had a very tall, straight mantelpiece, surmounted by two small marble images—Justice and Mercy. Justice held her scales down in one hand, and held a socket for a wax candle in the other. Mercy held the olive branch inverted in one hand, and a similar socket to that under the charge of Justice in the other. Between Justice and Mercy hung the only oil painting and the only family portrait in the room—presenting the sweet face of Margaret Stuart-Gordon. Two tall grenadier-like andirons, polished to a silvery brightness, supported the green hickory wood of which the *very* warm fires were made. The rug displayed a pattern of white lilies on a dark-green ground. This rug was soft as wool, as General Stuart-Gordon's pet cat knew. A short, deep, murrey-colored sofa was usually drawn up upon one side of this hearth, and a large study-chair on the other. General Stuart-Gordon still sat upon the old studying chair, but very sadly looked the vacant sofa, now that the gentle woman that had occupied it so long was missing away from it. Murrey-colored curtains hung at the windows. Lastly, two doors gave exit from this snuggery—one on the right into the central passage-way; one on the left into the vast saloon of the house, furnished in the most splendid style, but never opened except upon grand occasions. On the other side of the wide central passage were the more strictly housekeeping offices, still rooms, &c., but of these we do not need to speak now.

Louis Stuart-Gordon entered the oak parlor, and found his father sitting dozing in his study-chair before the fire; the cat was dozing, too, as she purred and hummed on the rug; and the green hickory wood was singing a tune as it burned. A pleasant, dreamy twilight gloom pervaded the room. Justice and Mercy were not yet lighted up, and the sweet face of Margaret Stuart-Gordon was lost in the shadows.

Louis threw himself upon his mother's vacant sofa, and seemed to feel that he was nearer to her. His gesture waked his father up; who, yawning, said—

"Ring for lights and tea, Louis, *do;* though it is very lonesome—Oh-o-o"—(yawning) "*very!* —drinking tea, you and I by ourselves—tiresome; I wish, Louis, you would get married!—there, ring, do! One can eat and sleep, if no more!"

Louis pulled the bell-rope, and a servant replied to it; and, throwing open the door, announced "Miss Susan Somerville;" and a young lady, followed by a matronly attendant, entered the room. Both father and son arose, General Stuart-Gordon advances with the stately courtesy of a Virginia gentleman of the old school, and, bowing gravely, led the young lady to the sofa, while Louis, after wheeling it closer to the fire, stood until she was seated. The countenance of the General plainly, though courteously, asked the question, "To what happy circumstance are we indebted for Miss Somerville's visit?" as he resumed his seat in the study-chair, while a servant lighted the wax candles in the charge of Mercy and Justice. It was beautiful to observe the contrast afforded by this girl's sweet calm, simple air, to the ceremonious manners of the old General. Taking her time in drawing off her gloves and removing her bonnet without an invitation to do so, she called her attendant, and, placing them in her charge, said sweetly, in her clear, pleasant voice—

"I have come over only to make tea for you and Louis, General, because grandfather has gone to Alexandria, and I am not wanted at home. Grandfather will stay a week at Alexandria, and I can come over and make tea for you every evening, if you would like it. I asked grandfather's leave before he went away, and he gave it to me, as you might know he would, for dear grandfather never hindered me from doing any thing I liked, in my life."

She spoke slowly, quietly, as she divested herself of her riding habit, and handing that also to her companion, reseated herself upon the sofa.

"We are penetrated deeply by your goodness, dear Miss Somerville," said the General, while the beautiful, soft eyes of Louis smiled his thanks.

I wish I could give you any sort of just idea of Susan Somerville. It were sacrilege to draw her portrait, and not to draw it correctly. She was a medium-sized girl—full—even *very* full formed—with the well-developed bust, round chin and cheeks, and full, sweet lips, that indicate a fine vital temperament; her complexion was very fair, her eyes large, dark, and calm, and her hair black and silky, and rippling in tiny wavelets over her head. She wore it carelessly, but partly twisted up behind, partly drooping down her plump white cheeks and throat. Her dress of dark stuff was neatness itself; but her *air*—her *air*—there, *that* was magic! She looked like one that calmly and deeply enjoyed her life in every vein. Wisdom and innocence reposed in her serene face. Her manner was full of grave, sweet comfort. She influenced you like a sedative. It was impossible to be in her company, to look on her heavenly—*no*, not heavenly, for there was a *great deal* of earth about it, but her dear, *good* face, without growing serene and quietly happy like herself. The most beneficial mesmeric influence emanated from the presence of Susan Somerville. Hers was a face in which you could place confidence, for you felt that beneath all this quietude reposed great force of character; nay, that the very consciousness of that power produced this beautiful and profound calm—the calm of a self-dependent, self-poised nature, reposing sublimely on its own great strength. She was really seventeen, but she looked twenty. While you have been reading this description of her, she has quietly taken out her knitting, and, to make herself more at home, gone to work at it, talking sweetly all the time the servant was laying the cloth and setting the table. It was just impossible for General Stuart-Gordon to go on with his Chesterfieldean manner—calling her "Miss Somerville," indeed, he never remembered to do it after first greeting her; and as for Louis, *he* never had addressed her by any other name than "Susan." He had called her Susan in their school-days, and no law of etiquette ever promulgated could make him call her any thing else. What an air of home and coziness her very presence diffused over that late lonely fireside. It seemed good to have her plying her bright knitting-needles, seated on the sofa; and when the tea-urn was set upon the table, it seemed natural for General Stuart-Gordon (what a tiresome name to write!) to say—

"Come, Susan, my love," and lead her to the table.

Let no manœuvring mamma or match-seeking daughter imagine that in Susan Somerville's conduct there was a single covert selfish thought. I affirm that it never occurred to her, that the old man of sixty, or the youth not yet eighteen, "were in the market." No, it was simply Susan Somerville's religion, to minister, in every possible way, to the comfort of those in her reach, perhaps with too little thought or care of self.

Tea was over. The evening passed cheerfully, delightfully. General Stuart-Gordon related numerous anecdotes connected with the Revolutionary War. Louis read an extract from one of Walter Scott's novels, and Susan chatted, or listened, while plying her knitting-needles. At nine o'clock she arose to go; and, attended by her matronly servant and by the man who waited on them both, she prepared to set out.

"And will you come and make tea for us to-morrow, Susan, my dear?" very nervously inquired the old gentleman.

"Oh, yes, indeed! to be sure I will—*every* evening until grandfather returns, for I am sure if I was to die I should not be happy in Heaven, if I did not know that some kind girl came and poured out his coffee, sometimes."

"That is a good girl! Louis and myself have dozed and nodded at each other all the evenings of this month past, until to-night, when you woke us up; and now we will not doze or sleep any more over the fire for a week," said he, as he walked with Susan down the terrace, across the lawn, and the stone steps, to the water's edge, to the little skiff, and with affectionate care placed her in it, and stood watching its progress across the river, until it stopped at the beach, and he saw her get out, and, with her attendant, *climb up the* bluff, and *disappear.*

CHAPTER VII.

THE CRAGS.

That dear old home!
Something of old ancestral pride it keeps,
Though fallen from its early power and vastness!
The sunlight seems to thy eyes brighter there
Than wheresoever else.

Fanny Kemble.

Remember the position of the Isle of Rays, the sunny centre of our neighborhood and story. Remember that the Isle was divided through the middle by a sparkling creek, and that the southern division of the Isle before and beneath the front of the house was cleared up and laid off in beautiful terraces, conservatories, parterres, groves, fountains, serpentine walks, &c., and that fronting this greatly ornamented southern division, across the river, lay the immense estate, and, surmounting a hill, stood the splendid mansion of Mont Crystal. Very well—now turn to the northern division of the Isle—the division lying back of the house, and still left in all the wild and luxuriant beauty of nature. It was thickly wooded, full of rocks, and intersected by several narrow paths—one of which conducted to a flight of rough stone-steps, cut in the side of the rocks, that led to the clean, sandy beach, where a boat was always moored for the convenience of communication with the northern shore of the river. This northern bank of the river was very different from the beautifully fertile southern shore, the seat of the Mont Crystal estate. This northern bank was wild, rocky, and picturesque beyond description, and, a little further up and back from the river, even sublime and terrific. This locality also comprised an estate that joined the Island Estate at its northwestern boundary. It was called The Crags, and formed the remnant, the wreck of a vast property, once owned by the Somervilles, an old and haughty Virginia family, now fallen from their "great estate." A flight of stone steps, cut in the rocky bank of the river, nearly opposite the Isle, conducted the traveller to the mainland, and, through a gate, to a narrow path leading now up a steep, craggy declivity, now down a rocky dell, now through a thick copse, now into the deep, rich shades of the forest, among the gorgeous foliage of the trees in their splendid autumn dresses—the glowing scarlet of the oak, the brilliant yellow hickory, the bright green pine and cedar, and the rich purple dogwood—to a high range of rocky and wooded hills, among which stood the irregular pile of buildings called, after the estate to which it belonged, The Crags. This was the retreat of old Major Somerville and his grandchild Susan—the unconventional little visitor of the Isle of Rays. Major Somerville had lived to see his patrimony melt away, acre by acre, under the miserable system of old-fashioned Virginia agriculture that he still persisted in, and that I have elsewhere described, until nothing remained, except the rocks and stunted copse-wood immediately around the rough-cast homestead; and to see his family, one by one, die off, until none were left but Susan, the only child of his deceased youngest son. She was, indeed, the angel of his old age. Susan's father had been the youngest of eight children, and had married late in life, so that the old man, her grandfather, was seventy years of age when Susan was born, and was consequently eighty-seven, as Susan was seventeen at the present time. By the death of both her parents before she had attained her fifth year, Susan was left in the sole charge of the old man of seventy-five. Major Somerville had no female relative or even housekeeper in his family. His domestic affairs were conducted by a skillful and industrious young mulatto woman, a faithful slave, who was the cook, housemaid, nurse, and seamstress—in fact, maid of all work, as her husband was steward, gardener, coachman, and groom—in short, factotum in general to the household. This faithful couple loved their decaying old master as though he had been their own father; and, coupled with this love was a veneration inexplicable as matchless to those who, never having lived in the South, have never had an opportunity of witnessing the superstition, the self-immolating devotion of some slaves to their masters and their masters' families—a consecration of self that is paralleled in ardor, and earnestness, only by a woman's devotion to a tyrannical husband, or a Pagan's devotion to his idol, and that is paralleled in *disinterestedness* by—nothing!

It was beautiful to observe the solicitous forethought by which this excellent couple averted the annoyance of debts and duns from the old man's door by a thousand little contrivances and economies, and by appropriating silently their own little earnings of the odd hours of their own time. "Old master's" tranquillity and respectability was the one thing needful to their happiness, and next in importance to this, Miss Susie's interests took rank. Much contrivance it required to confer upon Miss Susie the appearance and throw around her the *prestige* of little ladyhood—in a word, to dress her neatly and to send her to school. This was the way in which it was done, and this was the manner in which the happy illusion of moderate competency was thrown around the old man. After passing his seventy-fifth year, old Major Somerville was more inclined to doze in his arm-chair than to look into his accounts. His narrow income was derived from the sale of his small yearly crop, the proceeds of which was locked up in his bureau, divided into twelve equal portions, and given out once a month to George, who, in his character of steward, conducted the financial affairs of the household. Now, this sum was not much over half what was required for the monthly support of the family; and the alternative was to contract debt or to raise money. All slaves have certain hours in the twenty-four, called their *own* time, in which they may sleep, eat, or work, within the limits of certain time and space. These hours a few have been known to turn to so good account as to make money enough to purchase their freedom. This good couple devoted a portion of these hours to hard work—the manufacture of baskets, straw hats, mats, &c., all formed of coarse grass gathered in a distant marsh, brought home, and dried, cut, and twisted, and made up into various articles of domestic utility, which were afterwards sold in the neighboring villages. And, listen! the proceeds of these sales, that might have been put by to accumulate, for the purchase of their own freedom at some future day, were devoted—one half to the support of their "old master" and "Miss Susie," and the other half saved to buy the liberty of their only child, a little daughter, near the age of Miss Susie, whose little maid she was. Never was a more affectionate or considerate little mistress than Miss Susie, and never was a more devoted little maid than Annie; yet never for a moment were their relative positions forgotten by either, although with the feudal, the patriarchal usage of old Virginian families, where the children of the slave mingle freely with the children of the master—these two little girls were always together. But, on Miss Susie's part, there was that hereditary pride of family, the natural pride of place. She was born with it; it was in her blood; it was in her bones. It had been nursed—gently nursed, however—from earliest babyhood by all the family, and by every circumstance around her. It was a large, generous, noble pride—a quiet, gentle pride, however—and only manifested itself in a tender, protective consideration for those she supposed beneath her. This was external pride, if one may call it so, or the pride produced and fostered by external circumstances; but deep in Susan's bosom reposed a profounder pride—the pride of a great and essentially *good* nature, left untrammelled by restraint, as unwarped by prejudice—unfettered by attempts at either. Miss Susie was growing up, free, strong, and independent, in a soil of genial affection and respect. Perhaps this sort of rearing would not have suited every child as well as it did Susan's fine, deep-toned nature; at all events, it harmonized beautifully with *her*. And, on Annie's part, her love for her little mistress was *her* religion. She had been taught by her parents, with their simple faith in received opinions, to look up to Miss Susie as to a little queen, a little demi-goddess, a little white angel—in a word, whom—whom it was piety to worship; and Annie thought her thoughts, and dreamed her dreams, and prayed her prayers, and saw her visions, through Miss Susie accordingly. But when it was necessary to send Miss Susie to school, because she was white, and a young lady, and Miss Somerville —oh! then there were heart-breaking times for Annie—*not* because George and his wife had to take away another quarter of their earnings—being the half of Annie's freedom money—for Annie was too young to know any thing about that, and far too disinterested to care; but because for six hours a day she should be separated from her little patron saint—the little Virgin of her loving worship —Miss Susie! Couldn't she go with Miss Susie, and carry her basket of dinner and her atlas?—for of course the young lady would not carry her own basket and atlas—of course not; but then Miss Susie was to ride the rough-coated pony over the rocks, and George was to lead it and carry her things. Annie slept in Miss Somerville's chamber, on a pallet by her bed. Annie cried all Sunday night, because her little mistress was going to school Monday morning. Miss Susie would not sleep while she heard Annie's smothered sobbing under the quilts. "Say your prayers, Annie, and go to sleep," recommended Miss Susie. But, at the sound of her voice, Annie only wept the more, bursting from a low sob into a loud wail, a perfect roar of lamentations. Schoolmasters, she said, were ugly and horrid—were perfect bugaboos with big ferules—were ogres—were giants—were ghouls and gnomes—just such as Miss Susie heard about in the ghost stories. Susan stepped out of bed, *and sitting down by her side, tried to soothe her—in vain!* Every manifestation of kindness from Miss Susie added fuel to flames, or, to say something new, water to the cataract of her grief. At last Miss Susie recollected that she herself, she also, had a will and an inclination of her own in this affair, and she felt that very certainly her inclination sat in favor of taking Annie to school. So Miss Susie very quietly and very peremptorily decided. She bade Annie hush crying, and say her prayers, and go to sleep, for that she should go to school with her the next day. Yes, she should go and carry her basket; the weather was warm, and she could play out doors under the shade of the trees, while she herself was studying in the school-room; and when it blew up cold, or come on to rain, she should come in and sit on a low stool by *her* desk; and, as for the schoolmaster, of course he would consent to the plan, for, was she not Miss Somerville, grand-daughter of Major Somerville of The Crags, and would he think of denying her? No!

The little queen had no idea that she was of a whit less importance anywhere else than she was within the confines of her own domain. Early in the morning she proposed her plan, declaring that she preferred to *walk* to school, with only Annie to carry her satchel. After some consultation and delay, this plan was agreed upon, and the little maid was rendered happy in the novelties and pleasantries of trudging by the side of her little mistress over the rocks and crags, and through the copses, to school. The country schoolmaster was no ogre, but a mild, patient, long-suffering, and self-devoted soul, as nine-tenths of all the teachers I ever saw are. He permitted Miss Somerville's little attendant first to sit upon the door-steps, and afterwards, when he found how quiet, gentle, and humble she was, he sent for a little stool, and allowed her to sit upon it at the feet of her little mistress, where her position was understood and unquestioned, by the other pupils. It is a singular fact, in the experience of all teachers, that frequently a child will not, or cannot, learn the task assigned, but will catch by ear, or intuition, the lesson delivered verbally to an older and farther advanced class.

Thus a child too lazy to learn to read, catches by ear the lectures to a class, and thereby attains considerable knowledge of geography, or any other branch of education that may strike his fancy. Little Annie sat at Miss Susie's feet with no dull, stultifying column of words to learn, but with her little sharp eyes and quick ears at liberty to catch any seeds of knowledge that might fall in her direction. And, with human perverseness, and child-like contrariness, she learned all the quicker and more because she was not desired or required to learn. And, during their walks home, Annie would unroll her bundle of acquired knowledge, and display the treasures to Miss Susie's admiration.

"I know the shape of the earth, Miss Susie," she would say, raising her fine, black eyes to the face of the little lady; and then would follow a precise report of the geographical lecture of the morning.

"Guess who discovered America, Miss Susie."

"Oh, Christopher Columbus, to be sure!"

"Yes! Oh, warn't *he* a hero! Don't it make your heart swell up big to hear about him, Miss Susie?" the glance of her superb eye bounding up to the countenance of her young mistress.

Susie would always acquiesce earnestly, but calmly, as if great heroes and grand thoughts were familiar enough to her mind, causing no surprise.

But it was history that brought out all the finest points in little Annie's heart—that roused all the enthusiasm of her genius.

One evening, when they had been to school about two years, as they were returning home, Annie walked silently, solemnly, with her hands clasped upon her bosom, and her eyes cast down, in the involuntary and unconscious attitude of prayer.

"What is the matter, Annie?" inquired Miss Susie.

"Sir, William Wallace! oh, Sir William Wallace!" and then she suddenly burst into tears.

She alluded to a chapter in the history of England, comprising the reign of Edward I., that she had heard read in school that afternoon.

"So great, so good, so glorious, and to die such a death!"

"But, Annie, it was a long time ago; and now he is a prince in glory, crowned with stars. You must not cry about him."

"Ah, but it reads as though it had just happened!"

"Ah, but you see it has not, and could not, just happen; people do not do such things nowadays, particularly in our country, our *free* country, you know."

"Yes, I know; but still, Miss Susie——"

"Well?"

"Will you teach me to read now? I did not care to learn before, but now I wish to learn, so that I can read more about Sir William Wallace. I kneel down and worship him."

"Yes, indeed, I will be very glad to teach you; and you will read of many like Sir William Wallace; but you must not grieve for them—they are archangels now."

A seed of knowledge had fallen on good ground, and was producing fruit. A spark of fire had dropped into an ardent heart, kindling the soul of a poor slave-child into enthusiasm and power.

Can I portray, justly, the gradations by which this child's intellect ascended? Can I presume to describe the slow, beautiful, and sublime unfolding of her high soul, as she advanced towards womanhood? No, I will not even attempt it, but leave to the progress of our story to reveal the strange anomaly of a poor slave-girl, (blessed or cursed?) with lofty intellect, profound affection, and high aspirations.

CHAPTER VIII.

GENERAL STUART-GORDON'S "OWN MAN."

He has a shrewd wit, I can tell you; and he is a good man enough; he's one of the soundest judgments, and a proper man of person.—*Troilus and Cressida.*

Does he not hold up his head, as it were, and strut in his gait?—*Twelfth Night.*

UPON the morning succeeding Susan Somerville's first visit to the Isle of Rays, General Stuart-Gordon and his son met in the oak parlor, at an unusually early breakfast. Apollo Belvidere, the General's body servant, as a gentleman's *valet de chambre* is called in the South, was in attendance with his old master's outer garment, for the gentlemen of the Isle of Rays were already falling into slovenly bachelor habits, converting parlors into dressing-rooms, and *vice versa.* Apollo Belvidere needs a description, even for those who have seen the celebrated statue of the god of poetry, music, and beauty, who was *not* his antitype as well as his namesake. Apollo had been "old master's" man ever since both were boys, had attended him in camp, or, to use his own phrase, "had gone with him to the wars;" had cleaned his arms, brushed his uniform, and blacked his boots, during the whole Revolutionary struggle; had retired refulgent with the martial glory that blazed around the young hero, and was now reposing with him on his laurels.

What feats! what miracles! of military prowess, had his master, General Stuart-Gordon, accomplished! What folios, what tomes, what libraries, would the history of his exploits fill, as related by his biographer, Apollo, of evenings at the side of the great kitchen fire, to the assembled, admiring, and astonished household! On comparing Apollo's accounts of his master's slain, crippled, or "captivated," with the army reports of the killed, wounded, or captured, one would be forced to decide that Apollo told lies!—I beg pardon—"*elevated the real into the ideal!*"—or that no one else had shed blood in the cause of liberty. Apollo admired his master with all his soul, and imitated him with all his might. When Captain Henry Cartwright first married the heiress and assumed the name of the Stuart-Gordons, and took up his residence at the Isle of Rays, Apollo's pride in his master, and glory in the great alliance, was somewhat dimmed by the haughtily imposed condition that deprived the young bridegroom of his patronymic, illustrious as he considered it with military glory.

Family pride in America is, with rare exceptions, to be found only in Maryland and Virginia, where it characterizes the descendants of the high churchmen, the Catholics, and the cavaliers, who settled these States—or, among the very few families that emigrating thence, have settled in the Carolinas and the distant Southern States. In the far South, as in the North and the West, there is the pride of wealth—in Maryland and Virginia, only the pride of birth. And this tacit assertion of family dignity is as emphatic, in old Maryland and Virginian tobacco planters, as the same thing in an Irish baronet or a "Heeghland laird." And it extends from the head of the house to the poorest old slave bred on the plantation. Just as in Scotland and Ireland, peasantry and clansmen fight about the relative dignity of their lords and chiefs, so in Maryland and Virginia, the old family servants dispute about the comparative antiquity and respectability of their masters' families.

So it was a grievous mortification, as you may judge, to Apollo Belvidere, when his master, abjuring his patronymic, assumed the name of Stuart-Gordon. It was in a state of deep distress, between his pride and his humiliation, that, on the morning after the wedding, in emerging from the dressing-room of his master, at whose toilet he had just been assisting, Apollo Belvidere encountered Seraphina, the dressing-maid of the bride. It was the first time that the Apollo had seen "that Venus carbed in jet," as he afterwards called her. Apollo made a magnificent bow—just such a one as he had seen his master make on entering a ball-room; Seraphina courtesied—just as Miss Stuart-Gordon did on receiving a visitor; and then presumed that she had the honor of speaking to Mr. Apollo, Captain Stuart-Gordon's gentleman, and hoped that he would follow her in to breakfast, which was then ready in the front kitchen. Mr. Apollo winced; but, drawing himself up, thought that Miss Seraphina was under a "collusion;" he had not the honor of an acquaintance with Captain *Stuart-Gordon*, whom, he supposed, was the brother of the new Mrs. *Cartwright*, he said, as he accompanied her to the breakfast-table. Then Miss Seraphina, believing his assumed ignorance real, explained the conditions of the marriage. In reply to this, Mr. Apollo courteously insinuated that there must be still some mistake; that such an arrangement would be "converting all the substituted usages of society into miscord." Miss Seraphina expounded, with some *hauteur*, too! that it was a custom of the Stuart-Gordons, whenever an *heiress* of the house was given in marriage, to exact of the bridegroom the assumption of the family name; that this was very proper, for that they were descended from the royal Stuarts of Scotland; whereas Captain Cartwright, now Captain Stuart-Gordon, was of a comparatively new family. Apollo Belvidere plumed up!—pride conquered gallantry. His Chesterfieldean urbanity and propriety of manner, his Websterian precision and elegance of language were forgotten; starting up, he exclaimed—

"Pish! tush! tut! pshaw!—don't tell me about King Charles' unlegitimate descendants! King Charles himself was a rebellion hanged for treason! If blood were gold, Captain Henry Cartwright (I *will* call him Cartwright!) could sell and buy the whole house of you! He descended from King Charles, were you!" he sneered, with a diabolical grin of scorn and malice contorting his shining black face. "Captain Cartwright can say more than that! Captain Cartwright's *nigger* was descended from a King! I am great-grandson of Prince Tongataboo, Emperor of Eahei-poewai, and if I'm a man-servant now, it's through the fortunes of war!"

I do not know how Apollo Belvidere looked at that time, but I have heard him accurately described as he looked in his old age—as he stood that morning, near the door of the oak parlor, with his master's hunting-coat thrown across his arm, his spurs in his hand; his tall, broad-shouldered, erect figure, dressed in an old suit of his master's blue and yellow regimentals, was surmounted by a face black as jet, seamed and wrinkled like an Indian walnut, and shining like a dried prune, and topped by a crop of hair white as snow.

As the gentlemen arose from their breakfast, and as the General walked leisurely up to his old servitor, and, laying off his dressing-gown, and receiving the hunting-coat from his hands, addressing his son, he said—

"The hounds meet at Battletown Plains, this morning; will you not join us for once, Louis?"

Louis declined, with a grave smile. He was weary of reiterating his aversion to field-sports.

"What will you do with yourself, then, Louis? Stay, I will tell you. Ride over to Mont Crystal and call on Miss Armstrong—will you not?"

Again Louis gravely declined the proposition.

"You are a strange youth, Louis. 'Man delights you not, nor woman either.' How do you intend to pass the day? Why not pay your respects to Miss Armstrong?"

"Do you not think, father, that there is another lady who has a primary claim to my humble services, this morning?"

"Miss Somerville! Ah, yes. But Susan is such a recluse, that one scarcely ever thinks of visiting her. However, present my compliments to Miss Somerville, and, thanking her again for her condescension last evening, say that if I dared ask so much of her courtesy, I should entreat her to come over and pour out the old man's tea again."

Smiling unconsciously at this droll blending of natural social affections with prime conventional ceremony, Louis bowed acquiescence; and the General, now fully accoutred, went out from the house, and, mounting his great black hunter, set forth for Battletown Plains.

CHAPTER IX.

THE MISTRESS AND THE MAID.

> One whose life is like a star,
> Without toil, or rest to mar
> Its divinest harmony—
> Its God-given eternity.
> *Aldrick.*
>
> A being of sudden smiles and tears,
> Passionate visions, quick light and shade.
> *Hemans.*

Louis Stuart-Gordon sauntered slowly, abstractedly; *feeling, without* noticing, the cheering influence of the sunlight, flashing on the bright waters, and burning on the gorgeous crimson, golden, and purple-hued foliage of the trees—sauntered down the marble steps, and across the terrace, to a finely-gravelled serpentine walk, which conducted to a little iron gate on the west, that led from the ornamented grounds into the copse, and thence, through a rough path, to the rocky thicket behind the house.

Passing through this tangled thicket, and down the rough stone stairs, he stepped into the little boat fastened to a post on the beach, and loosening the chain that confined it, took the solitary oar and rowed for the opposite shore, secured his boat, and, ascending the rude steps leading up the rocky bank, stood upon, the mainland.

The path leading through the copses and thickets of that wild and rocky shore towards The Crags, "the short cut," as it was called, for striking *direct* through every sort of horrible obstacle, was toilsome and perilous to the most agile and athletic traveller. It was intersected by deep, though narrow, rocky chasms, the descent and ascent of which were rendered more difficult and dangerous by the slippery surface of the rocks, and by the absence of any bush or projection to aid in going down or climbing up.

An hour's toilsome walk, or rather climbing up and down, yet still ascending as he advanced, brought Louis to the summit of The Crags, upon which stood the old gray house. It was a large, irregular pile of buildings, constructed of the gray rock found on the spot. A wall of the same rude material closed in an extensive yard, specked, not shaded, by a few dwarfed pine and cedar bushes. The ground outside of this stone wall, and immediately around the house, was bare, sterile, and rocky. The first English proprietor of the estate could have had no other inducement to erect his mansion-house here, than was afforded by the fine salubrity of the air, and the magnificent prospect around. The view from the south front of the house was, on the right hand, beautiful as Eden; on the left, sublime, and even terrific.

South from the craggy heights on which the house stood, rough, rocky, and jagged hills, tufted between the clefts with clumps of stunted trees, fell pitching and precipitating headlong towards the river. On the west, towards the Alleghanies, through a defile of which roared onward the river, till it thundered over the precipice, and, with many a rebounding leap, and re-echoing howl, hurried, boiling and foaming, among the jagged rocks of the blasted channel, until, falling over a lower decline, it glided on smoothly towards the rising sun, dividing to embrace the sparkling Isle of Rays. This was the prospect on the east, south, and west.

Behind the house, on the north, the hills reared higher and still higher, while they fell backwards towards the horizon. Once, thousands of acres of the rich plains and luxurious forest lands below, were owned and cultivated by the Somervilles—now, nothing remained to the old man and his grand-daughter but the blasted heights known as The Crags. You will wonder where this old and impoverished gentleman raised his slender crops. About in spots: on small patches of moderately fertile soil; on the sunny fall of some of the hills; on the alluvion between them; or on the low shore of the river where it glided on below the Isle of Rays.

There were two or three small out-houses, such as a kitchen, a smoke-house, &c., like the mansion, built of gray stones, and the ruins of many more, stuck here and there within the walls of the large yard. There was an air of great stillness and solitude in the scene as Louis entered the old gate, before the warm, bright, morning sun had had time to melt the frost from the steps of the old piazza, in this cold locality. Louis rapped at the oaken door, which was immediately opened by George, the *factotum* of the household, and who, turning the lock of a second door, namely, on the left of the wide entrance-hall, announced—

"Mr. Stuart-Gordon!"

And Louis, passing in, found himself in the family sitting-room, and in the presence of Miss Somerville and her attendant, Anna.

It was a poor room, large and ill-furnished, with decayed, old-fashioned furniture, consisting of an old carpet—whole, but faded all into one dark-brown hue—old high-backed walnut chairs, with leather bottoms; little spider-legged mahogany tables and stands; a tall, right-angular walnut cupboard, with glass doors, in one corner; a tall, old mahogany escritoir opposite, in the other; a third corner being filled up with a high, coffin-shaped clock; and the fourth being occupied by the large, right-angled fireplace, that crossed it. There was something *here* that compensated for all the poverty of the room. Virginians are accustomed to say, "A *good fire* is a handsome piece of furniture," and here a glorious fire of oak and pine wood blazed on the ample hearth, roaring up the chimney, and diffusing a genial warmth through the large room! Miss Somerville and her maid were both seated at the fire, with a work-stand between them. Miss Somerville, looking as serenely beautiful as usual, in her dark stuff dress, with her glossy, black hair, half-carelessly caught up behind under her tortoise-shell comb, half-dropping in soft, black, shining rings, down one plump, white cheek. Susan was engaged in needle-work, and her attendant was reading to her, as Mr. Stuart-Gordon entered. The girl immediately closed the book, and keeping her place in it with her finger and thumb, held it upon her lap, while her head was bent, and her large, sloping, gloomy black eyes, half hidden by their heavy lids, fell upon the floor. Miss Somerville arose with her usual serene dignity, and welcoming her visitor, begged him to be seated. Anna also left her seat, and courtesying respectfully, withdrew to the other end of the long room. Susan following her with her eyes, as though she were half inclined to summon her back. She did not do so, however, but turning, seated herself, saying:—

"Anna was just reading Ivanhoe to me. Miss Britannia O'Riley, Miss Armstrong's governess, receives all these new things from Washington, and she is so kind as to send them over to me, after she has perused them. Anna reads them aloud, while I sew; and," added she, *sotto voce*, "Anna possesses that rarest of all accomplishments, a fine elocution. I should like to have you hear her read."

"I should be very much pleased to do so, indeed," said Louis, "she must have a fine conception of her subject, as well as a musical voice and a good enunciation, to delight so much Miss Somerville's fastidious taste."

"I am not fastidious, as I do not pretend to taste; yet Anna has all the fine points of a good reader that you have enumerated, and I think perhaps I have judgment enough to appreciate them—poor Anna!"

"And why poor Anna? Is she not very happy in your gentle service, Miss Somerville?"

"You do not know the girl, Louis, or you would not ask me. Look at her *now*," added she, in a subdued voice.

Louis turned his eyes to the window at which she stood, and was struck with the attitude and expression of utter despair into which the girl had unconsciously fallen. Louis looked at her with an attention that he had never before bestowed on Miss Somerville's attendant.

And now he observed for the first time that she possessed the most lofty style of beauty. Her tall, full, graceful figure was finely curved, as she leaned upon the high back of an old leathern chair, looking abstractedly from the window, the light from which fell upon her superb head, covered with a magnificent suit of black hair, that, dividing above her broad, pale forehead, rippled off into thousands of tiny jet-black, glistening wavelets over her temples and around her cheeks, and was gathered into a large knot confined by a silver bodkin behind. Her sloping, gloomy, but beautiful eyes, the sad expression of her full, red lips, closed as they habitually were, were added to the fascination of a face that attracted without volition or consciousness. Her dress was of the coarse linsey-woolsey worn in winter by Southern house-servants, but hers was plaid, of very brilliant colors, made high in the neck, with sleeves reaching the wrists, fitting accurately her charmingly developed form, and harmonizing well with her dark, imperial style of beauty. Louis looked at her, at first, in obedience to Miss Somerville's indication; then with surprise and admiration at the singular beauty he had never before noticed; and lastly, with wonder as to the sorrow, the recollection of which could so suddenly convert the lately ardent and animated reader, glowingly alive to all the beauties and sublimities of her subject, into the pale, cold, lifeless statue of despair, so apparently lost to the world around her, as to be totally unconscious of the scene and presence in which she stood. Louis turned his eyes inquiringly to the serene countenance of Miss Somerville.

"*She is a slave!*" murmured Susan, in a low, but emphatic tone.

Louis looked perplexed, bewildered, and did not reply. Susan smiled sadly at his embarrassment, as she continued gravely—

"You would *say*, Louis, that you were already *aware* of that fact; that this was nothing *new* or *extraordinary* in her position—that, in a word, you *know* she is a slave; but do you also know, Louis, all that means to *her?*"

He did not reply, but seemed engaged in thought. Susan continued, in a low, earnest voice—

"No; you, like other excellent men I know, look on slavery with indifference. It is the *nonchalance* of custom. But this girl! I tell you, Louis, that were you or myself now reduced to slavery—were we to change positions *with one of our* slaves—become his property—*subject to his orders—a thing* to be chained, imprisoned, beaten, bought, sold, at his whim—neither you nor I could have a more poignant sense of degradation than she suffers; for, Louis, she had naturally a sensitive heart and a lofty intellect, and, even in her condition and circumstances, both have been too highly cultivated for her peace."

"I suppose," said Louis, thoughtfully, "nay, it is inevitable, that her condition must be painful and humiliating in proportion to her intellect and sensibility; but was the cultivation of this mind and heart *well?* Was it even *merciful*, on your part, Miss Somerville? I think in her case, indeed, where 'ignorance is' so palpably 'bliss, it is folly to be wise.'"

"Even if I had been disposed, I could not have repressed the growth and development of Anna's intellect; but do not think that I *was* disposed! No, Louis; let the soul have free course to reach its highest life, through sorrow and anguish, if necessary. No, Louis; any life and light, even the life of suffering in the light of fire, is higher than the death of darkness, of stillness, of nothingness. No, Louis; give her the fires of purgatory rather than the ease of annihilation."

The usually calm face of the girl was inspired and glowing while she spoke.

"You are right, Miss Somerville, perfectly right," said the youth; "and," added he, blushing ingenuously, "I feel ashamed of my superficially formed and hastily expressed opinion."

Seeing now that Anna had withdrawn from the room, Miss Somerville continued to speak of her.

"She has been my intimate companion from babyhood up. I do not remember the time when Anna was not by my side. She went to school to wait on me. Could any one—even had such a one been affected with your just expressed opinion, as to the inexpediency of educating a slave—could any one, I say, suspect that a little child, sitting at my feet without books, could pick up an education by eye and ear, feeding her hungry mind with the crumbs of knowledge that fell from the rich man's table; or could any one have prevented the progress of such a mind, only once awakened and aroused? Anna has been and is dear to me as a sister. She has more ardor, more fire, than my Anglo-Saxon blood gives me, and even in her childhood I have seen her kindle into enthusiasm when history or poetry gave back the gorgeous past, and heroes or martyrs again lived, struggled, suffered, or died before her. Then her admiration, her enthusiasm, was unalloyed joy! She was so charming, that her society was, to me, unmixed delight. Her appreciation gave effect to books otherwise only moderately interesting to me, as her eye and voice kindled her subject into brilliance. Louis, that was in her simple, self-forgetting childhood, when we were sisters and companions, and walked with our arms around each other's waists. But here is now another period—a time of self-remembrance and of sorrow to both of us—of humiliation to her. *Now* she will at times glow with something like her old enthusiasm when reading some tale of daring achievement, or of courageous endurance, or self-immolating martyrdom, in some old history or high epic poem, and her cheek will burn, her eye blaze, her tongue grow eloquent with the enthusiasm of her soul. Then, suddenly, as memory comes, she will become silent, grow pale as ashes, and, involuntarily, inevitably, fall into an attitude of mute despair. She never speaks of her position, her sorrow; I never heard her utter a word of complaint, impatience, or repining, in my life. I have seen her suffer excruciating *bodily* pain, and when I have been distressed to death at her agony, she has smiled a mournful smile at the sympathy that could so far forget, or was so unconscious of the great, the permanent, the all-absorbing sorrow of her life, as to lavish itself upon a minor and transient trial."

"But is this, must this be, a *permanent* sorrow?"

"Alas, I greatly fear so! though God knows the only thing needful to my repose is Anna's freedom."

"And can you not accomplish this object, so just and so dear to you, Susan?"

"Ah, no! You are aware, or perhaps you are *not* aware, of my grandfather's peculiar disposition, or, to speak more accurately, his present peculiar state of mind. He is very old, you know, nearly ninety, and he has a nervous dread of losing the control of his own mind—a fear lest I should suppose him imbecile—in his dotage—a suspicion that I think him incapable of self-government, and that I wish to govern him. This makes him exceedingly jealous of my influence, exceedingly suspicious of any plan I may propose to him, and the more anxious I feel for the accomplishment of my wishes, the firmer he shows himself in the rejection of the proposition, whatever it may be. The first time I was struck with this was the day on which I first went to him to petition for Anna's freedom. Anna had fallen into one of her fits of deep but mute despondency, from which nothing on earth could arouse her. Though she said nothing, I gained the *cause* of her despair, and suddenly, for the first time, the possibility of its *removal* occurred to me. I went to my grandfather, as he was dozing in his big arm-chair, and spoke my petition. Awakened suddenly and very much surprised, he gazed at me in silent perplexity. I repeated and urged my petition; and then he smilingly caressed me, and told me that my patrimony in land and negroes was too small to bear abatement, and that young girls knew nothing about such things. Then I began to *reason* with him—that was unluckily thought of; it awakened his jealous self-esteem, and he said gravely, even mournfully: 'My dear Susan, I give you the largest personal liberty; you may do what you wish to do, in the way you wish to do it; go where you like, when you like, and stay as long as you like; make what friends or reject what acquaintances you please—unquestioned and unreproved by your grandfather. I leave you to your own government, because, Susan, I think you capable of self-guidance. Pay me the respect of believing the same thing of me, my dear!' What could I say? I said every thing I could think of, but the more I talked the firmer he became—he seemed adamant. I have returned again and again to the subject, without any other effect than, of late, that of irritating him."

"And yet there is not a gentler-hearted man in the world than your grandfather."

"Yes! that is it. If the thing had occurred to his own mind first, he would not have hesitated a moment. But it is mournful to see how shakingly he sits upon his tottering throne, and how tremblingly he holds his falling sceptre of self-sovereignty, and how he dreads lest some one should wish to wrest it from his feeble grasp. It is pathetic to see the sad compromise he makes by offering me *my* free will on condition that I should not seek to fetter *his*."

"There is a sadder sight than that—Anna! Yet still, Miss Somerville, I cannot see why you set the seal of despair upon Anna's sorrow by calling it *permanent*. In the course of nature, before very long, the destiny of Anna, if she lives, must fall into your hands, and you will free her at once."

Suddenly a dark shadow overswept the countenance of Susan Somerville, and she for an instant lost the power of reply. Then, recovering somewhat, she said sorrowfully—

"Alas! you do not know—my poor grandfather does not know himself—that he is overwhelmed with debt; that he lies hourly at the mercy of a set of creditors, any one of whom at any time may levy on his property, and sweep off house, land, and people. There, sir! that is the great terror of my life—the daily expectation of seeing my foster-parents, George and Harriet, that excellent couple, and my dear foster-sister, Anna, sold into *redemptionless* slavery, and to see my feeble, gray-haired grandfather turned houseless into the world!"

Louis was surprised, dismayed, at this unexpected information. He did not for some moments attempt to reply, but fell into deep and serious thought. At last, judging that the hour of their frugal dinner was near, and not wishing to embarrass them by his presence, he arose to take leave, expressing his hope and his father's wish that Miss Somerville might come over in the evening.

"I will do so," said Susan, quietly.

"Then, dear Miss Somerville, will you permit me to come, and meet, and escort you?"

"If you please," said Susan, absently; then added, "Yes, I thank you! I shall be very happy."

CHAPTER X.

THE OLD COUNTRY SCHOOLMASTER.

> His very manners teach amend,
> They are so even, grave, and holy;
> No stubbornness so stiff, nor folly
> To license ever was so light,
> As twice to trespass in his sight;
> His look would so correct it when
> He chid the vice, yet not the men.
>
> *Ben Jonson.*

REMEMBER that the northern bend of the river was wild and rocky, rising to The Crags, and that the southern shore, upon which was situated Mont Crystal, was undulating and hilly. Remember that the northern, the rocky and barren bank was *behind* the palace on the Isle of Rays—the southern, the undulating shore, was *before* and in front of it. Recollect, that in sight of the front windows of the palace were two homesteads. I pointed them out to you myself. One, the nearer, and far the more magnificent, was the marble-fronted mansion of Mont Crystal, "crowning a gradual hill," rising from the river shore. Of the *other,* the more distant and the humbler, you *could see nothing but the* top of a steep *gable-ended roof, sticking up* from the thicket of trees, on the right hand towards the east of Mont Crystal. That thicket of pines, with the sloping plains behind it, forms the Dovecote farm, and the steep-roofed, gable-ended cottage is the farm-house. The farm is very small, and the soil is very poor—is quite worn out, from having been worked too hard and too constantly, and fed too little; and the farm-house is very small, and very much out of repair. The Dovecote farm is called by the name of its old owner, Gabriel Dove, a patriarch of seventy years of age, who has been the schoolmaster of the neighborhood for the last fifty years, and after a long life of the most laborious toil and self-denying frugality, and of the most beneficial devotion to others, found himself at seventy a much poorer man in this world's goods than he was at twenty, when he entered the profession. He had received the teacher's meed of poverty and pleasant memories. It was the old man's pride to claim every child, man, and woman, under sixty years old, in the neighborhood, as his some time pupil. The haughty lady of Mont Crystal had conned her A B C under his tuition. General Stuart-Gordon had scrawled his first pot-hooks and hangers on his forms. Gentle Margaret Stuart-Gordon had cooed her a-b-abs at his side. And at a later day, young Louis had studied his Greek exercises and solved his Euclid's problems under his eye, and the calm, wise Susan Somerville had studied her grammar, while the eager Annie sat at her feet, drinking in large draughts of knowledge, and kindling into enthusiasm when the chivalry or martyrdom of the past was the theme of instruction; and how the schoolmaster loved those little girls—the serene Susan, the ardent Annie! and many a *sly,* kind pat on the head and stroke of the cheek did the latter receive—for it would not have been expedient to have shown her favor in the presence of the other pupils—it would have ended in some of his proud patrons requiring her expulsion from her humble seat, or have broken up his school! He did not wish the former, he could not afford the latter alternative. So he tried to keep Annie quiet and happy in her lowly station of mere sufferance. Ah! the heart of the gentle old man was gladdened by such pupils as Susie and Annie, and he could ill afford to lose them. And there, too, close behind Susie, murmured the voice of another little maiden, conning her little task—Zoe, the adopted daughter of the old schoolmaster—that was all that was known of her. The old man had opened his door one fine summer morning, and found a babe packed up in a basket upon the porch; and after having recovered from the shock and collected his scattered senses, and after having vainly endeavored to prevail on some of the rich neighbors to adopt the child, he had carried it to the almshouse one evening, had returned home, and groaned in the spirit all night, and had risen at early dawn, and travelled over to the almshouse, to reclaim the little castaway, had brought it back, and adopted it. One half the neighborhood said the old schoolmaster was mad, and the other half would have hinted that he had been wicked; but that "the very fangs of malice" could not have gnawed a flaw into which to insert a doubt—so crystal, pure, and polished had been the old man's life. So little Zoe (that was the name he gave his adopted baby) was conveyed to the care of the old free negress, whom he had hired as his cook, housekeeper, &c.

But now times were very badly changed with the old man. I cannot say that he had seen "better days." He had never seen *good days*, much less "better" ones. In a worldly and pecuniary point of view, *his* days had been *bad*, and now they were *worse*. He was *older*, and, for his life of self-devotion, *poorer* in purse, and *feebler* in person, than he should have been at seventy. Teachers wear out sooner than other men; I do not mean spurious teachers, who take up the "trade" for a mere livelihood—but teachers anointed by God himself for their mission and their martyrdom. The country boasts—no, never boasts of them—their "quiet paths of unobtrusive goodness" lead through the unfrequented by-ways of life. Their prospectuses do not fill newspapers, but their labors fill hearts and heads, at least a *few* hearts and heads, with goodness and wisdom—the country possesses many such. But times that always had been bad, were now worse with our old schoolmaster; his energies were decayed, his steps were tottering, as he leaned more and more heavily upon his stick, as he bent forward towards the scene of his daily labors. His hand trembled as he guided the pen or pencil of his pupils, and his eyes dimmed with reading, and the letters of the Latin grammar swam together, even with the aid of his spectacles.

People began to whisper that the old schoolmaster was getting too old and infirm for his business, and *that he ought, in justice* to the *neighborhood, to resign it to younger* hands; and many began to remove their children from his charge. The old man had now about twelve pupils, at from two to five dollars per quarter each. As is always the case, the parents or guardians of only about *half* this number paid him; so that the old schoolmaster's income did not amount to more than twenty-five or thirty dollars per quarter. Even this small salary was fast, very fast, decreasing. At the end of every quarter, and especially at the end of every half year, some of his old pupils were sure to drop off, and their places were never supplied by new ones.

So much for his school.

At home, changes had also transpired. The old negress, who for many years had been his housekeeper and servant, was dead; and the old schoolmaster's reduced means did not allow him to employ another. The cares and labors of the household devolved on his adopted child, Zoe; and admirably did the little maiden acquit herself of the duties.

Of all the old teacher's pupils, of sixty years old and under, none remembered or visited him, with the exception of *two*—a brother and a sister; the sister, a girl whose name was a by-word and a mockery in the neighborhood—Gertrude Lion—the Diana, the amazon, the giantess, the Gerfalcon, as she was called; the brother, Brutus Lion, a masculine exaggeration of all that was most obnoxious and unpopular in the character and habits of the Gerfalcon.

CHAPTER XI.

THE DOVECOTE AND THE DOVE.

Go lift the willing latch—the scene explore—
Sweet peace and love and joy thou there shalt find,
For there religion dwells, whose sacred lore
Leaves the proud wisdom of the world behind,
And pours a heavenly ray on every human mind.
Dr. Huntington.

There is a light around her brow,
A holiness in those dark eyes,
Which show, though wandering earthward now,
Her spirit's home is in the skies.
Moore.

THROUGH the front windows of the Island Palace you have already caught a distant glimpse of the steep gable-end of the Dovecote peeping up above the thicket.

Now let us take a nearer view. The Dovecote is rather a cot than a cottage. It is the tiniest and the most secluded little home in the whole valley. No highway comes near it. One narrow foot-path leads to it. This path leads down the southern descent of the richly wooded hill of Mont Crystal, and meandering lower and deeper into a glen that opened a narrow vista to the river, and passing through the thicket and across the brook at the bottom, leads gently upward to the little wicket-gate of the small garden in front of the tiny cot wedged up against and sheltered on three sides by closely pressing and thickly wooded hills. Thus this sweet, secluded little home is visible only from one point—towards the Isle of Rays. This one path, wending past the tiny garden-gate, leads through a short, rich brushwood, down to the sandy beach of the river, where to a post is tied a little skiff with one oar, in which the old schoolmaster rows himself across the river every morning and evening in going to and returning from the scene of his daily school labors. For, be it remembered, that the school-house is situated on the opposite bank of the river, and far up towards The Crags.

The Dovecote, besides being extremely small, is constructed in the simplest form, and out of the rudest and readiest materials—the walls, of twenty feet square, being built of red sandstone found on the spot, and the roof being covered with pine boards, now nearly black with long exposure to the weather. One little door, with one little window to the left, are shaded by the projecting eaves of the roof which, supported by straight pillars made of the slender trunks of the pine-trees, with the bark on, forms the rude porch. There is room for the little garden only in front, the sides and back of the house being crowded by the hills.

So, dear young school-girl reader, the Dovecote is no stereotyped, neat white cottage with green blinds, the custom-sanctioned abode of youth, love, and romance; no—its colors are those of the Virgin Mary's costume in certain old Flemish pictures, namely: dun red beneath, dusky blue above, but more picturesque, more beautiful, and romantic it is, I assure you, than your sentimental fancy thing of white and green could be. The deep rich hue of the red walls, the fine, dark-blue roof, surrounded by the brilliantly variegated colors of the gorgeous autumn foliage, the glowing scarlet of the oak, the dark green of the pines and *cedars*, the bright yellow hickory, the rich *purple dogwood, crowning* the close hills, and *the intense blue of the* mountains in the background, formed a fine, rich, deep-toned picture, that, when the sun mounted to the meridian, kindled into burning refulgence.

So much for the outside of the picture—now come in.

This small front door admits you into the room—the *only* room on the ground floor. Look around—this apartment is parlor, kitchen, and dining-room, for the little family, yet it is the picture of neatness. The walls are colored stone-gray; on the floor is a home-made carpet of red and green plaid, and at the only window is a red and green paper blind to match. Just opposite to the door you enter is the fireplace, where a clear, bright fire is burning; on each end of the mantelpiece is a bright brass candlestick, and a small clock occupies the centre. On the right hand of the fireplace is a corner cupboard, with glass doors, through which you can see the nice, clean crockery ware. On the left hand is a deal table, scoured white as a curd; the chairs are of common white deal, to match the table. And in one corner of the room, to the left of the window, is a small stand with a drawer—that is Zoe's work-stand, where she keeps all her needlework; but it is never removed from that corner, because on top of that stand is the cottage library, consisting of the family Bible, Shakspeare, Milton, and the Life of John Howard; and above the work-stand, next to the window, hangs a portrait of John Howard—*that* was the image the old schoolmaster worshipped! Little did he think he was an idolater.

Above stairs there were two little bedrooms, one occupied by the old man and the other by Zoe.

And now I want to tell you about this red and green plaid carpet on the floor. It is just laid down. It is the work of Zoe's own hands —the product of Zoe's own industry and economy. Nothing is lost in that small household. All the old man's cast-off garments, and all Zoe's worn-out clothes, have been saved for years past—have been washed, cut up into narrow strips, twisted into cord, dyed—one-half green and one-half red—and is now woven into this fresh, new, bright carpet. Zoe has an especial little housewife's pleasure in having drawn out from the crysalis of an old-clothes barrel the butterfly of a new plaid carpet. It is an event in her life that this new carpet is now finished and laid down, and that she has been able, from her scanty savings, to purchase the window blind to match it. The old man has not returned from school yet, and she is awaiting his arrival with great interest, to note his expression of surprise and pleasure when he finds the hitherto bare, cold boards covered with that bright, warm carpet, that gives such an air of comfort and coziness to the room.

It was the last school-day before Christmas—that is, it was Friday, and Christmas was to come on Tuesday—*therefore*, Zoe had laid down her new carpet, had made up a glowing fire, had rerubbed the brass fire-dogs to a silvery brightness, and had painted the brick hearth with red ochre, found in the neighboring brook. She had set the coffee-boiler over the blaze, made an Indian-meal johnny-cake on a long pine board, propped it up with a smoothing-iron before the fire to bake, and laid two red-herrings on the coals to broil. They could not afford a table-cloth, for those were not the days of cheap goods, but Zoe's white deal table did not need one—it looked very nice, set out with its blue delf-ware. Zoe was happy, busy, and watchful. She sat down to quilt-piecing, while watching her johnny-cake bake.

It is time to describe this bonny small housewife. She was a gentle, tender little creature, with a fair, delicate skin, with soft, dark eyes, and fine, silky black hair, inclined to curl, but plainly twisted up. She wore upon this festive evening a dove-colored merino dress, with a black silk apron and little white collar—these were presents from her friend "Brighty," who asseverated that a pretty child ought sometimes, at least, to be prettily dressed.

If I were obliged to describe the cottage and the young cottager by *one* epithet, I should call them *clean*. "So neat and clean," was the form of praise every body bestowed upon the little house and the little housekeeper, by all the kind-hearted neighbors. "You might take a fresh pocket-handkerchief, and wipe up the floor from one end to the other, without soiling the cambric;" would be the asseveration of all the admiring matrons of the neighborhood, when holding up the little housewife as an example to their daughters or to their domestics. Yes; the little apartment was glittering with cleanliness. And now, as the day is declining, the sunbeams smile into the room, and the smile is flashed back, here, and there, and everywhere, by the bright brass candlesticks on the mantelpiece, by the fire-irons, by the mirror, by the clear glass tumblers, by the clean crockery-ware in the corner cupboard, and by the glittering tea-service on the table. Lastly, the sun smiles archly, slantingly, on the glistening little black head and nice gray dress of Zoe, and, withdrawing its rays, sinks below the horizon. Zoe has watched and waited anxiously, her supper is ready, and it is now quite time her father was in. She has laid aside her work, and has gone to the window to look out. The sky has changed, the wind has shifted to the east, and blown up dense white snow clouds—a snow storm is rapidly coming on—Zoe remains at the window, anxiously looking down the foot-path leading to the river, and hoping that before the snow begins to fall, her father may have reached home.

"I wish he *would* come," murmured Zoe to herself. "Oh! how I *do* wish he would come," and she strained her eyes down the darkening path. Then she ran up stairs, and bringing down his warm, soft, wool-lined slippers, she laid them before the fire, and, taking out his wadded wrapper from a closet under the stairs, she turned the sleeves, and hung it over the back of the chair to warm. Then she resumed her watch. Never did lady watch for her lover with more anxiety than did little Zoe for her old father. The snow was beginning to fall fine—soon it thickened, so that she could not see an inch from the window. It was growing quite dark. She lighted a candle, and, drew up the paper blind, so that he might see the light from the house, as a guide. "Ah! I know what keeps him," said Zoe; "he is breaking up school for two weeks only, and yet he must give an affectionate farewell lecture to the school in general, and a loving exhortation to each pupil in particular, as his or her wants may require. Dear father! It is getting too dark now; he will lose his way; I must go and meet him." And, rising, she ran up stairs, got her cloak and hood, lighted a lantern, and set out, followed by the cream-colored setter, who had risen and stretched himself, as soon as he saw her come down with her hood on. She walked on through the whirling snow, the dog keeping closely at her side. She reached the beach where the boat was usually tied. It was too dark and snowy to see any thing beyond the short glare of the lantern; but she knew, of course, that the little skiff was not there—that the old man had, that morning, as usual, passed across the river in it—and that it was now moored on the other side, awaiting him, if, indeed, he were not now returning in it. She walked down to the edge of the river, and threw the glare of the lantern across it. She could see nothing; the snow was freezing as it fell, and her cloak was getting stiff with ice. Her feet were like lifeless clods, and her hands so hard and numb, that she could scarcely hold the lantern—so she hung it on the branch of a tree, as a beacon light, and stood waiting. Now she could see the river, and the little boat crossing the line of light thrown by the lantern, and soon it reached the beach, and soon a crackling footstep sounded on the frozen snow, and then the old man's hand was laid in blessing on her head.

"God love thee, my dove-eyed darling!" he said.

"Oh! father, your hands are *so* cold! Lean on my arm, and let us make haste home. Supper is ready."

"Lean on *thy* arm, my poor little girl! Walk on before, with the lantern, child, and I will follow thee."

She obeyed him. The thick falling snow prevented further conversation, and they entered the little cottage before another word was exchanged between them. Then Zoe dropped her own cloak, and helped her father off with his great coat, his boots, and so forth; and then she brought him his wrapper, and, lastly, the old man sat down in his study-chair, ran his feet into the warm slippers, and stuck them out to the fire—all without noticing Zoe's new carpet. Zoe was shaking and carrying off the cloaks, &c., and hanging them up in the closet under the stairs. And then she came back and placed supper on the table, and the old man turned around to take his seat at it. And now, when the candle was lifted off the mantelpiece, and set upon the table, and its rays fell down upon the bright red and green carpet, the old man exclaimed with surprise, "Why, Zoe!"

"Yes, father! ain't it pretty?" said she, with a smile.

"But—but, where did you get it, child?"

"I *made* it, father!" she replied, with honest exultation.

"*You*, Zoe!" exclaimed the old man, holding his coffee-cup half way between the table and his lips.

"Yes, father; *me*, Zoe"—playfully imitating his tone.

"But *when?* Where? How? What out of?"

"When? Where? How? What out of? One, two, three, four questions. First, when? —Through all my leisure time for the last month. Where?—Up in my chamber. How?—With those powerful little magicians—needle, thread, and scissors. What out of?—All the irreclaimable old clothes that have collected in *the house for many years* past," replied Zoe, *with dancing eyes*, *so happy in* being able to prove that the fine carpet was a creation of her own.

"Well done, my little housewife."

"Oh, father, I do *so* love to *make* things."

"You do?"

"Yes, indeed, father; but now, father, as you have catechised me, may I not catechise *you?*"

"Presently, Zoe; but tell me first—for my examination is not yet over, there are other questions to be asked, other mysteries to be cleared up—where did you get that pretty dress? Did you make that, too? I never saw it before."

"No, father; I was determined to christen my dress and my carpet on the same day—the day of your relief from school-duties—the commencement of our holidays—*to-day*."

"But you have not told me where you got it."

"Oh! from Brighty. Miss Britannia O'Riley gave it to me."

"*Miss Britannia O'Riley gave it to you*, my dear! and why did Miss O'Riley give it to you?" asked the old schoolmaster, seriously.

"Because she loves to see me nice. Was it not right, father?"

"My darling, you used sometimes to speak the *truth*, however unpalatable it might be to Britannia, did you not?"

"Yes, father, sometimes."

"When she was sarcastic, satirical, irreverent, you were accustomed to keep a grave, serious face—and when she would question you on your sobriety, you would reply with truth that you disapproved of her want of veneration—were you not?"

"Yes, sir."

"*Yes*, you performed that office of friendship honestly; but *now* how would it be? Suppose, *now*, in such a case what would you do?" Could you still gravely rebuke her levity?"

Zoe was silent and thoughtful. At last—

"Answer me, child!" the old man said.

"Father, *no;* I should think of all her kindness to me—"

"Of her *alms* to you."

Zoe hung her head.

The old man continued—

"And feel yourself a debtor and a slave in her presence."

"Oh, father!"

"Yes, child, you compromise your independence, and endanger your integrity, by accepting any favors from those upon whom you can have no possible claim, and whom you cannot hope to repay."

"Oh, father, what can I do? I cannot give it back to Brighty, now that it is made up and has been worn; that would insult her. What can I do?"

"Nothing that I know of, child; but you must not lay yourself under any unnecessary obligations in future. Zoe, my darling, you have nothing but your independence and integrity—keep them. And in regard to Miss O'Riley, do not, in the least, change your manner towards her. Do not indulge or flatter one foible of hers, because she has made you a present."

"Oh, father! Brighty would not ask me to do it. Brighty is noble, generous, frank."

"But proud, satirical, and high-tempered. She is of a large and highly wrought temperament; full of good, and full of evil. She needs you, Zoe, to take part with her *good* nature against her evil. Yes, she needs you, little Zoe; do not fail her."

"Father, needs *me*—Brighty, with so much genius, beauty, spirit?"

"Yes, Brighty, with so much genius, beauty, and spirit, *knows* that she needs the little, humble Zoe to keep her in mind of duty. Again, I say, do not fail her."

"Why, father, *sometimes*, when she has drawn it from me, I have repeated *your* lectures, second-hand; I never set up, I never presumed to set myself up, for Brighty's mentor."

"And that is the reason, my dear, why she accepts you, because you do *not* presume. Brighty cannot defy a meek and lowly mentor. Do you think that if, instead of being born in the manger, Jesus had been born in the purple—if, instead of taking the form of a servant, he had assumed the insignia of royalty, that his lessons of reverence, of humility, of self-denial would have been even so well received as they were? No, the *pride* of human nature would have rejected him."

"And yet, father, human nature is given to worship all the 'pride, pomp, and circumstance' of place, of rank, of royalty."

"Yes, my dear, but not to hear from them, or to profit by lessons of humility and self-denial. Those who would teach humility with effect, must first have made themselves of 'no account;' he who would teach self-abnegation, must first have 'offered himself a sacrifice for many;' in a word, my dear, precept can only be effectually *inculcated when the* sincerity of *the preceptor is demonstrated* by his example. My love, whole libraries of sermons, of philosophy, or of ethics, would not do me a tithe of the good effected by the reading of one chapter in the life of Christ. But to return to Brighty; you are the only one about here who can be of real service to her, and you must not indulge her faults. She herself will not respect you any the more for it."

"Dear father, I am not a man, and therefore I am not over anxious for the cold 'respect' of those I love; but you say true about Brighty, for the other day, after she had given me this dress, she indulged her temper in bitter and pungent sarcasms levelled at Mrs. Armstrong, appealing to me frequently, and I—"

"Yes—well, what did you do?"

Zoe was silent.

"*Simpered*, instead of looking grave, I am afraid, my dear."

"Something like that, I am afraid, father."

"And she?"

"After her temper fit was over, and she had repented, she said to me—'Zoe, why did *you* let me go on so? Why did you not look at me or touch me?'—that is what she said, and she looked *so* sorry."

"Ah, you had not come up to her help—you had not taken sides with her good nature against her bad. What withheld you?"

"I did not like to seem to blame her, just after she had—"

"Laid you under an obligation!—was that it?"

"Yes, sir."

"I knew it, only I wanted to hear you say it. That was not gratitude—it was a *mean* feeling."

"Oh, father, *I* am not mean."

"It was a *mean* feeling, a spurious gratitude. Every virtue and every emotion, my love, has its base counterfeit, which deceives not only its *object* by hypocrisy, but oftentimes its *subject* by *self*-deception. It made you betray your trust for a paltry dress."

"Father, I did not mean to betray my trust, and this is not a paltry dress; it is a nice, pretty dress: it is such a sweet, dove-colored dress; I love it. Brighty said that it just suited me, and that there was not another girl in the valley who ought to have it. But, father, I know what I will do; Mrs. Armstrong is going to give a great dinner and ball, and there are a great many handsome dresses to be made up, and Miss O'Riley engaged me to make three—one for Mrs. Armstrong, one for Miss Armstrong, and one for herself. Now, when they are completed, I will receive payment only for the first two, and when Brighty offers to pay me for hers, I will steadfastly refuse to take it."

"Do so, my child—that will be right. But why did you not think of it before?"

"Because, dear father, I did want *so much* to buy two blankets—one for you and one for me,—and it would take the price of *three* dresses to buy them."

"Then, darling, you will have to sacrifice that pleasure to allow for that folly," said the old man, benignly.

After a silence of some minutes, Zoe said—

"Now, father, I am going to put *you* on the defensive. Father, what made you stay out so late? You, at your time of life, keeping me so uneasy—making my heart ache—to say nothing of the johnny-cake being burned, the fish scorched, and the coffee boiled muddy?"

"My dear, perhaps you had better not have asked me—perhaps it would be better for your cheerfulness not to know—but I never keep secrets from my girl; she shall be brave, and learn to endure; then, Zoe, two-thirds of my twelve pupils left school at the end of this term, being this evening. If I commence school again at the first of January, it will be with four young pupils—two dollars per quarter pupils. Do you think, daughter, we can live on eight dollars a quarter—that is, two dollars and sixty-six cents a month?"

"Oh, father!" said Zoe, looking tearfully in his face.

"Poor little thing, it is sad for you, my darling!"

"Oh, father, not for me—you did not think I was thinking of myself? Oh, no! I am young, I am healthy and strong, and can endure. I am young, and life may change, but *you—you!*"

"I am *old*, and have not much longer to suffer or to enjoy, darling; therefore it is of little moment to me."

"But oh, father, after your faithful life—your life of toil, of self-denial—to find yourself at seventy without a dollar beforehand! The laborer is worthy of his hire, indeed, but the laborer has not received it," complained Zoe, in a tone of deepest sadness.

"The day of settlement has not come yet, my love."

"Oh, but father, to think that you should be left so."

"Zoe, I have lived seventy years in this world, and never suffered long either for food *or for raiment; God*, who has brought me to *this time of my life*, will not desert me now. 'Take no thought for the morrow,' 'sufficient for the day is the evil thereof,' said the divine Master, and that mandate does not strike so much in the light of a command as in that of loving advice—a sympathizing reassurance from warm and loving lips. Come, we will accept it in all faith. Come, Zoe, clear away the things from the table. Give me the Bible, and take your needle-work. We have a good fire—provision enough in the house to last until after New-Year. Come, darling, we will be faithful—we will be cheerful. 'The cattle upon a thousand hills' are the Lord's, and 'He knoweth that we have need of all these things.'"

"But, father," said Zoe, as she drew the table up before the fire to the old man's side, and set the candle, the snuffers, the big Bible, and her little work-basket upon it, "father, I do not see a ray of light."

"Nor I, my dear."

"What are we to do?"

"Walk by *faith*, not by sight. People can walk by sight, and have no need of faith when they can see *light*. It is in *dark* days alone that we can exercise faith. There, now, take up your sewing, darling."

And Zoe took out her patch-work, and the old man began to read from the Bible the parable of the three sparrows sold for a farthing, neither of which should fall to the ground with the Father, and the same lesson in the Sermon on the Mount, and that Psalm of David commencing, "The Lord is my shepherd, I shall not want." Thus the old man tried to fortify his soul against the evil days to come. He *was* strengthened. He closed the Bible, and his face was very serene—was *holy*—was even irradiated. He fell into a profound reverie. Zoe had also fallen into a reverie, a most painful reverie. Zoe had not lived long enough, suffered deeply enough, observed carefully enough, to have taken note of God's sure providences, and so she had not the cheerful faith of her adopted father.

"If this had happened in summer, it would not have been so dreadful; but in this hard, hard winter, oh, it is terrible! what will he do? He would not, upon any account, receive assistance; no, not a dollar, not a peck of meal."

So Zoe cogitated. At last, seeing her father so silent, she thought him sad, and inquired—

"Don't you find it very lonesome, father, with nobody but me here?"

"Lonesome, darling?"

"Yes, sir, I should think you would be."

"Why do you think so, Zoe? Is it because *you* feel it lonesome here, with no one but *me?* I should not wonder at you, nor blame you, darling, if it were so."

"*Me* lonesome, dear father; no, never! When you fall into a brown study, and don't want to talk, haven't I got my quilt to piece? You don't know how interesting it is, matching and contrasting these colors. See, for instance, what a pretty hexagon this is; the centre piece crimson, then white," said she, laying the pieces on the table.

"I sometimes pity gentlemen, because they are not privileged to take the interesting, amusing, and sedative employment of needlework."

Soon after this, the old man offered up the evening prayer, and blessing his child, they separated for the night.

◆

CHAPTER XII.

"LORD LION, KING-AT-ARMS."

Who thundering comes on blackest steed,
With slacken'd bit and hoof of speed?
Beneath the clattering iron's sound
The cavern'd echoes wake around
In lash for lash, and bound for bound;
The foam that streaks the courser's side
Seems gather'd from the ocean's tide.
Byron.

It snowed all night. All night, laying awake in her bed, Zoe heard the tinkle, tinkle, of the sleet against the window glass. It was day, but dark, when at last she fell asleep. When she awoke, the sun was shining brightly into the little room. Zoe arose, dressed herself, looked out. The storm had passed—the sun had risen in splendor on the sleet—the scene was too dazzling to look upon—the whole ground sparkling with a coat of white diamond dust—the forest seemed an enchanted one—the trees formed of clear shining glass hung with millions of pendant jewels for foliage. Zoe shut her eyes quickly to save their sight, and when she opened them again black spots followed her glance all around the room. Zoe went down stairs to get breakfast. Like a careful little housewife as she was, she always kept a store of cut wood in the shed at the back of the cottage, in case of any such bad spell of weather as this. She went in there, and getting an armful, carried it into the room, and soon had a nice warm fire. She filled her tea-kettle, and, hanging it over the blaze, began to set the table for breakfast. It was eight o'clock, and her father had not yet come down. While she was busied in mixing her johnny-cake, a sudden crashing and crackling, a sudden rush and whirr, a sudden shudder and quiver of the earth, as at the passage of a railway-train, and a gigantic rider on a huge black steed shot past, followed by two dogs. The vision rushed past so quickly, that Zoe had but lifted her hand from the meal and looked up, when it was gone. When she turned her head again, it was to see her old father entering the room.

"Good morning, daughter!"

"Good morning, dear father!"

"What noise was that?"

"Brutus Lion on his big black horse, Earthquake, followed by his dogs, Thunder and Lightning."

"Ah, yes! he has started a fox early this morning," observed the old man, sitting down before the fire, and beginning to draw on his boots.

After breakfast, the old man, putting on his hat and taking his staff in his hand, said—

"I am going over to The Crags to see the Major. He has returned from Alexandria, I hear;" and set out.

In fact, the old teacher could not stay at home; he had a childish delight in making the most of his holidays. Zoe watched him uneasily down the slippery path, went out, and watched down to the beach, until she saw him enter the boat; saw him safely cross the river, ascend the opposite bank, and disappear far up the road towards The Crags. She could see him distinctly on the brilliant snow, until his figure seemed a black speck on a distant white hill. She had watched him past the dangers—the rest of the way was safe and easy on *that* road; and she returned to the house to clear up the breakfast-table. She set her room in order, went up stairs and made the beds, returned, took out her "interesting" quilt-piecing, and sat down to it, humming a gay air to persuade herself that she was happy. She sat there sewing for hours, stopping only to replenish her fire, to sweep up the hearth, or to caress her tortoise-shell kitten. She sat there while the sun had mounted high in the heavens, still quite absorbed in the shaping of hexagons and the matching of colors, until that crash and crackle, the rush and whirr was heard, the shudder and quiver of the ground was felt, and the huge dark rider on his gigantic black steed halted with a shock at the door, sprang heavily to the ground, and, pushing open the cottage-door, strode in, and paused before the young cottager. They were a queer contrast—the condor and the humming-bird, the elephant and the kitten, the giant and the fairy, were something like it. Brutus Lion stood six feet nine inches in his weather-proof boots. His immense chest was "backed" by shoulders of corresponding breadth, and over them hung elf locks—black, strong, and wiry—and above them reared a haughty head, with strong marked American Indian features, and Brutus Lion boasted descent from one of the red natives of the soil. His Anglo-Saxon ancestor had been a furious and bloodthirsty republican, a regicide who had sat upon the trial of King Charles I., and who, on the accession of Charles II. had escaped to Virginia, changed his name, assuming one that suited his character, taken to wife the daughter of a powerful sachem, and settled himself in a defile of the western precipices of the Alleghanies, to which he gave the significant name of "The Lair." The Lions of the Lair were a gigantic race, and distinguished in all the wars of the new world—in savage warfare, in the old French war, and in the Revolutionary struggle. Between the wars, in the intervals of peace, they were, both men and women, "mighty hunters before the Lord." Now, the sole representatives of the Lion family were the giant, Brutus Lion, and his sister, Gertrude, the "Gerfalcon."

As Zoe arose to welcome her visitor, he stooped, and placing his great hands under her arms, raised her up, and stood her upon the deal table facing him, and he said *then*, and not *till* then—

"Good morning, humming-bird."

Zoe blushed, laughed, and then blushed again. She was probably accustomed to this sort of treatment.

"Take me down."

"I won't! or if I do, it will be to stand you upon the mantelpiece until I have done talking to you; do you think, dormouse, that I can break my back in stooping to talk to you?"

"Oh, you are so proud of your huge bulk; you exaggerate its necessities to make us think it still bigger; you needn't to be. *I*, now, whom you try to treat with contempt, *I have* a right to be proud of *my* size."

"You, you grain of mustard-seed, you! Why, *pray, if one may ask?*"

"*You have hit it; just* because, little as I am, I *am* a grain of mustard-seed; and you, big as you are, are nothing but a rock."

Brutus Lion was not quick-witted; he only looked at her stupidly, while he searched for an answer.

"O," laughed Zoe, "I can take the conceit out of you in no time at all, and make you admire me; or at least convince you that you ought to. Listen; every thing *very* precious that God has made is very *small*. Take the stones; first, see how very small and rare the diamonds are, and what immense piles of sandstone there be. And the metals; how little gold, how much lead. And the flowers; how tiny the sweet violet, how tall the scentless sun-flower. And the birds; how small the skylark, who,

"Singing still dost soar, and soaring, ever singest,"

compared with the waddling, gabbling great goose. And the animals; how small, elegant, and fiery, the tigress, compared with the tame, servile elephant. Ah, believe me, every thing rare, costly—every thing beautiful, elegant—every thing brilliant, spicy, fiery, is small. Men put their very piquant spirits and very precious perfumery into very minute vials, they only put fish-oil in hogsheads. Oh, go to, you are a hogshead!" laughed the little one.

The giant looked at her from head to foot, breathed hard, rubbed mirthfulness, though quite innocent of phrenology.

"Zoe, you—you—you little *witch*, you, I'll—I'll *marry* you, I'll be shot if I don't, only to pay you for this!"

"I wish to gracious you would! I wish to *goodness* you would! It would be fun alive to torment you to death."

"You torment me, you *little* thing you! you *small* thing, you!"

"Yes, my dear giant; I have seen a little wasp drive a great ox mad by buzzing into his face; his highness the ox being utterly helpless in the case."

"Ah-h."

"Will you put me down, now?"

"Indeed I am afraid to; I am afraid I should inadvertently put my foot on you, if I were to; I never like to walk about where there are little chickens or very small women."

Then he took her little head between his large hands, and looked in her eyes as though he wanted very much to kiss them; but, respecting her loneliness, he lifted her down, and she resumed her seat and her quilt-piecing. He drew the old man's studying-chair up before the fire, and, seating himself in it, said—

"Are women *always* sewing, Zoe? It used to be carpet-rags you were always cutting into strips, sewing into strings, and winding into balls. Now what is it? I thought, to be sure, when that was done, that there would be no more of it; now, what are you doing?"

"Making a hexagon quilt—don't you see? It is for father's bed."

And here, at the name of father, the girl sighed heavily, and fell into thought.

"What is the matter, Zoe?"

"Oh, about *father!*"

"And what about him?"

"The people think him too old, now, to teach, and so they take his pupils from him. If he recommences on the first of January, it will be with only four pupils. What is he to do?—what is he to do? He has worn his life out in ceaseless toil, and now, near the close of it, has not the wherewithal to smooth his passage to the grave. To think of it! The incalculable good he has done in this neighborhood, and the miserable reward he has got! Old soldiers and old sailors, who have resigned the more profitable pursuits of agriculture, manufactures, trade, or the learned professions, are remunerated in their old age by the justice of the power they serve; but the old schoolmaster, who has spent his days in the most laborious and the most anxious of all pursuits, what is to become of him, what is to become of father?" And the tears trickled down Zoe's cheeks.

"Don't cry, Zoe, don't! Something must be done for him."

"A hat carried around, I suppose," sneered Zoe, with unusual bitterness.

"Why, Zoe! what has come over you? *That's* not like you!" exclaimed the Colossus; "when I said that *something* must be done for him, I meant, of course, something that would not compromise his dignity."

"And what will that be? This neighborhood owes him a huge debt that can never be repaid. He has been the missionary, the civilizer of this whole district—yes, and for the matter of debt, they owe him substantial dollars and cents; not more than two-thirds of his *soi-disant* patrons have ever paid him."

"Those debts must be collected—their aggregate amount must be considerable."

"No—he has sent in his accounts once to each. He is delicate and sensitive, and will not press those who, knowing his condition, still put him to the shame of dunning them," complained Zoe, *wiping her eyes*, and *resuming her needle.*

Brutus Lion mused, sighed, groaned, arose and walked uneasily about the room, reared himself up against the closed front-door, folded his arms, and watched Zoe, absorbed in her needle-work, muttered to himself, "I wish Gertrude Lion, or Zoe, one of these women, had some sense! I will not, however, indulge the folly of either much longer; so long as their caprice only annoyed *me*, I could bear it; but now that it is likely to injure Zoe, it must be corrected?" Full five minutes he contemplated the rather pretty picture presented by Zoe at her needle-work. He resumed, speaking aloud—

"Study Latin now, Zoe?"

"Yes."

"And Greek?"

"No. Father says one thing at a time; and I am to discontinue the Latin lessons this Christmas, and commence with the Greek this New Year's."

"What time of the day, Zoe, does your father give you lessons?"

"When he comes home in the evening, he hears me recite the lesson that I have committed to memory through the day."

"And is it a great pleasure to him to teach you?"

"Oh, yes, father has a passion for the classics; he grows eloquent in praise of the Latin, enthusiastic in eulogium of the Greek. Latin, he says, is the language of heroes, Greek the tongue of gods."

"There is not," mused the young man, partly to himself, partly aloud, "much more trouble—no, there is positively less trouble and *more* interest in teaching a class of attentive and intelligent pupils, than in giving instruction to one; and then how much more excitement and ambition is felt in a class, where there is rivalry and emulation, than by a single pupil, Zoe!"

"Well!"

"Wouldn't he take a class?"

Zoe looked perplexed. She did not understand. "Who? What class?"

"I have been thinking of forming a Greek class, and getting your father to take charge of it. Miss O'Riley, Gertrude, and myself, would form, with you, a small, but rather an interesting class; don't you think so?"

Zoe had been arrested by his past words to that effect, and now she was looking at him with absorbing interest.

"I say, we all want to learn Greek—Brighty, and Ger, and myself; and I say, we are all anxious to form a class, and place ourselves under the instruction of your father. *Now* do you comprehend?"

"I *do* understand you, good Brutus. I understood you all the time, dear Brutus! How you, who detest books, and loath study, should contract for four or five mortal hours of close application a week, for the benevolent purpose of serving my father, without wounding his love of independence. Don't I know, dearest Brutus, how much easier it would be for you to send him five hundred dollars, and have the Greek lessons off your mind, than to put yourself to school, and pay for your lessons! God bless you, best Brutus?"

Through all this earnest acknowledgment of Zoe, Brutus Lion sat there like an enormous baby receiving a chiding, with his huge frame all unnerved, quivering to dissolution like a mammoth jelly, under the infliction of Zoe's glorifications. At her conclusion he stooped, took up the tortoise-shell kitten, and began to caress it. Praise embarrassed Brutus. Zoe's praise overwhelmed him. Dropping the kitten, he stood up, his great eyes rolled—"I will see you again about that, Zoe," he said, in a high assumed voice, by way of proving his self-possession. He then rushed from the cottage, mounted his horse, and was soon out of sight.

Zoe stole to the little window, and looked after him until rider and horse had vanished from sight.

"I think it will do him good to study, and that is the reason I will not interfere with the method of his benevolence," thought the little maiden; and all the while her eyes were dancing, and fitful smiles were chasing each other across her cheeks. Ah! there were too many pleasant points about this projected class-meeting, for the sobriety of Zoe. First, a relief for an indefinite period of time, from the pressure of pecuniary want upon her father. Then the employment—the interest it would afford him; and "last, not least," the certain enjoyment, for at least three days in the week, of the society of Brighty, and—and—but we will not betray her. Perhaps it was the Gerfalcon, whose company she next coveted. She longed for the return of her father.

"Oh! I wish he *would* come home before evening, so that I might tell him, and save him a day's gratuitous anxiety. Oh! how I *do* wish he would." But Zoe's wishing did not bring him any sooner. She plied her needle briskly, her fingers receiving a new impetus from hope. At twelve o'clock she arose and made her dinner of a slice of cold johnny-cake, and then resumed her work. When the sun was declining, she arose, put away her work, and began to prepare their little frugal supper, knowing that at least her beloved father would be home to *that* meal, which he never missed. Upon the strength of her new hopes, Zoe committed an extravagance—cooked a chicken, and made wheaten biscuits for supper. And she set the table and dressed herself in her pretty dove-colored frock, and sat at the window, watching for the old man. At last she saw him descending the hill that led from Mont Crystal. She wondered at that, having expected his approach *up* from the path that led from the river where he crossed every day. She surmised that he had taken The Isle of Rays, and Mont Crystal, on his return; and this was the fact. The old man, with the new liberty of his holiday, had spent the day in making calls upon his present patrons or his former pupils. With his childlike faith and carelessness, the old man had forgotten anxiety for the future, in enjoyment of the present. "He had no thought for the morrow" upon this day, at least; and now he was coming down the hill, supporting himself in the descent by holding the stick before him, and wearing the very peace of Heaven on his brow, down on either side of which the silver hair flowed upon his old brown coat. Zoe ran out to meet him. Delighted by the divine tranquillity that rested on his beautiful face, Zoe exclaimed, taking both his hands—

"Oh! you have heard, then, father!"

"Heard *what*, my child?"

"Oh! you have *not* heard, then! I thought you had, by your looks, and I felt glad that you had been spared a day's anxiety," said Zoe, standing by the side of the old man, and drawing his arm around her neck, so that it was supported upon her other shoulder.

"But what is it, my child?" he asked, looking gently down into her eyes. "It is some good news, Zoe, I suppose, by your glad looks."

"Yes, it *is* some good news, and concerns *you*."

"Some of my old pupils coming back?"

"Yes, father, some of your *very* old pupils coming back—you guessed it so quick—*did* you know it? I thought you did, by your looking so peaceful and happy."

"It was the influence of nature acting under my Father, my love. Zoe! look at that setting sun; it has language—eloquence, to me. I climbed up the other side of this hill—wearily, heavily—and the sun was in a cloud. I thought of the toil by which I had reached the summit of my life, the top of the hill—it was very gloomy, and I looked down the descent of the hill as I contemplated the decline into the vale of years, feeling that in both progresses my only care should be to prevent myself from falling precipitately and prematurely down. Then I put out my stick, and began to descend cautiously. It was very dark in the valley, so that, with my dim eyes, I could not distinguish the shade of a bush from a hole in the ground, when lo! the sun broke through the dense blue cloud, and smiled in my face! and smiled on my head! What could I do but lift my face and smile back, Zoe? It glowed all over this rich scene—it glowed all over me—it glowed all through me; what could my heart do but burn within me, Zoe? It said, 'Bless you, bless you!' so softly—so brightly. What could I answer but 'I am blessed! I am blessed!'" Zoe was walking by his side, looking up in his face with deep reverence. "Do but observe the scene before you, Zoe," and the two children—the silver-haired man, and the raven-locked maiden—paused reverently to receive the large, full, deep *benedicite* of nature. It was not strange, then, that the old man's mind could not fasten on the necessities of his position. They had descended the hill, reached the cottage, and entered it, before he said—

"And now, Zoe, what about new pupils?"

"You are to have a class of grown-up pupils, if you will take charge of them. Brutus Lion and his sister, and Brighty O'Riley, wish to come and learn Greek. Oh, father! it will be so much better than your school. They will attend *you*, here, so that you need not have to go out in all weathers. The plan is not quite mature yet, for they will need to consult you about the most convenient days and hours, and about the fees, &c.," said Zoe, as she helped the old man off with his overcoat. He was in deep thought. He did not reply to her until they were seated at the table. He did not observe the new luxuries of the broiled chicken and biscuits, until he had asked a blessing. *Then*, when stretching forth his hand to help himself to bread, he looked up smilingly to Zoe, and glanced back at the platter.

"Yes, father," she said, "yes, I consider we are able to eat wheat bread, now!"

"Little darling!" he said, "if we had lived by *faith*, rather than by sight, we would have thought ourselves able to eat wheat bread yesterday. Little darling, it is well not to *waste* our daily supply; but when we have only enough, *barely enough for* our daily *comforts, we should appropriate* the *whole* to-day, and trust the Divine Providence for to-morrow. You have been growing thin and pale, Zoe, by not taking nourishment enough. There is a slow starvation, Zoe, as well as a rapid one. *You* have been starving yourself from want of faith—from want of faith in your Heavenly Father—in your kind Heavenly Father, who loves you, and will take care of you all your life. Oh, Zoe! I am moved to tell you, my darling, always to trust God, even *unto death*. Faith is worth nothing, if it does not go *beyond* the grave. See, Zoe! you have had enough, and barely enough, to live on for the last three months—that is, October, November, and December; but you were afraid that we should have nothing for January, February, and March, and so you denied yourself proper nutriment, and have suffered a waste of flesh, and health, and energy, which it will take some time to repair. If you had had *faith*, Zoe, you would have been in a better condition now. But no, darling, you said to yourself, 'It is true that we have enough for this autumn, and only enough; but if I do not pinch this fall, we may perish with want next winter.' Did you not, Zoe?"

"Yes, father, I forgot that 'sufficient unto the day is the evil thereof,' but I remember that poor people *do* sometimes perish by want."

"*Never*, darling! no one ever *perishes* by want, or any other agent. *They pass hence*, who can conceive to what comfort—to what joy! Go on, calmly, Zoe; 'take no thought for the morrow;' trust God through every thing, through all things, even through the prospective horrors of a death from starvation, believing even that to be a dark passage to a bright world. Life is made up of moments. *Eternity* is made up of moments. Be innocently happy with all the means and appliances God has given you in the present, and trust him with your future. There is no danger that he will forget you. He 'knoweth that you have need of these things.' Do not stint yourself, Zoe," continued the old man, elocutionizing his words by helping himself to a whole side of the chicken; "do not stint yourself, Zoe. It was not until the multitude had eaten and were *filled*, that the fragments were gathered up. The dependence, the faith, the wisdom of little children, are often held up to our view by the Divine Master. The parents of a little child give it just enough for one meal. It is satisfied, happy, consumes the whole without fear of wanting another. But what would you think of the child, who, when its mother had given it a piece of bread, just enough to satisfy hunger for the time being, should deny himself, and, putting aside half of it, should say, 'I shall be hungry again, and I am not sure my mother will give me bread.' Would it not be monstrous—revolting? Well, *just* as monstrous, just as revolting, is our habitual manifestation of distrust of our Divine Parent. I am not counselling you *against* economy, but for economy in this; for was it not bad economy, dear child, to have consumed your flesh and saved your means? Is it not bad economy for a man to devote himself so exclusively to business as to waste health and strength, for the sake of saving time and making money? Great labor, great parsimony, are not either of them economy. The proper limitations of getting and keeping, are your own necessities, and the rights of others. For instance, a man, in overworking himself, frequently both injures his own health and deprives some one else of a share of labor necessary to his support. In saving, a man too often hoards away that which is absolutely necessary to the preservation of his own health and strength, or his neighbor's life. That is not right. Self-preservation is the first law of nature, and should be obeyed. Next, the superfluous coat or cloak should be given to him that has none. But you are not drinking your coffee, Zoe; drink your coffee, child;" and the old man, enforcing precept by example, addressed himself to his supper, and did not speak again until near its conclusion, when he said—

"Yes, I am glad; I am thankful for this light arising out of darkness, though I knew before it dawned that the Lord would not forget his old servant. Yes, I like it! It will be pleasant to teach Greek to intelligent and appreciating pupils. It will be pleasant to be able to remain at home and receive the young people by my own fireside! Yes, it is all pleasant!" and the old man arose from the table, and settled himself in his large armchair for the whole evening.

Zoe cleared away the tea-things from the table, drew it up to the fire, and, seating herself on the opposite side, drew out a half-finished purse, and began to knit on it. The old man was less abstracted than usual—

"What is it thee's doing, Zoe?" he said.

He was from Pennsylvania originally, and *whenever his mood was* peculiarly tender he *ell into his Quaker dialect.*

"What is it thee's doing, Zoe?"

"Knitting a purse, dear father."

"A Christmas offering, darling?"

"Yes, father."

"Dear child! I know who it is for," exclaimed the old man, looking in her face with so much benevolent affection, but so expressive of "it is for her old father," that the rose-clouds rolled up over Zoe's face. He smiled at her embarrassment. She could not bear to deceive him.

"Dear father!" she said, "I *have* got something for you, something nice, something better than this, but this is for—for—for *Brutus.*"

A pause, a deep silence, ensued. *Zoe* was silent from embarrassment—the old man apparently from deep thought.

At last he said, "Come hither, Zoe!" and she came.

"Sit on my knee, Zoe;" and she sat.

He drew her arms around his neck, and, taking her face between his venerable palms, held it, looking into her eyes—

"Does thee love Brutus Lion, Zoe?"

Her eyes fell, her cheeks crimsoned—she remained silent—he steadily, lovingly, gazing on her.

"Does thee, Zoe?"

She with her deep veneration forced herself to reply—

"Father, on my soul's honor I do not know! I know the full depth of meaning in your question, and would not treat it with levity or evasion, but—I do not *know.*"

"Does *he* love you?"

"Yes, sir."

"How do you know?"

"He has told me so many, many times."

"When?"

"Oh! often; I could not tell you *how* often."

"He was here this morning?"

"Yes, sir."

"Did he tell you he loved you this morning?"

"Yes, sir," replied Zoe, the blood burning in her cheek as though it would take fire.

"What did he *say*, Zoe," asked the old man, caressingly.

Zoe started, mused, grew pale, then flushed to her very brow.

"What did he *say*, Zoe?" persisted the old man, stroking her hair.

"Father, he said—*nothing!*"

The old man looked gravely in her face.

"What do you mean, my darling?"

Zoe was covered with confusion, she bowed her face in his sheltering bosom, and he felt the tears on his neck.

"Zoe!"

"Father!"

"Tell me what is the matter, my darling."

But Zoe seemed overwhelmed with humiliation. She could not raise her head, or look him in the face. He lifted up her head, and kissed her on the brow. She drew a long breath, dashed away the tears, and, looking at him long and earnestly in the face, said—

"Father, I would not deceive you wilfully—would I?"

"No, my darling child."

"Thank you for saying that, dear father! Yet, father, I have unwittingly deceived you, because I first deceived myself. You dispelled the illusion by asking me 'what did he *say?*'"

"I understand it all, my child. The love-tuned voice, the love-beaming eye, speak a language stronger, more eloquent, more convincing, than words—and maidens receive it in all faith. And many an honest and honorable man will hold himself guiltless of the wounded heart that *these only* have won. But, Zoe, you are thoroughly convinced that Brutus loves you, and you are not sure whether you return his affection. How is that, Zoe?"

"Dear father, I do not love to talk of it."

"Your heart folds its leaves like the sensitive plant, even at your father's touch, dear Zoe. Zoe! why can you not unbosom yourself to me? You think me old and cold. Ah, Zoe, the heart that has not done or suffered great wrong is *never* old or cold. Child! my hair is white as snow, you see, my cheeks are withered and fallen, and my eyes are sunken and very dim—yet, Zoe, under this shrivelled bosom is a fresh, young heart, and shrined in that heart is an image, which is also a fountain that keeps it green—the image of a dear girl I loved in youth, Zoe, and have loved all my life. She went to Heaven, child, but has not even there forgotten me. She ministers to me often; she communes with me always. If I were to attempt to prove this to you, Zoe, you would think the old man fanciful. I reveal this to give you courage to give *me* your confidence, Zoe; that you may not think youth and old age, white hair and black, separate hearts too far for sympathy. Now, then, Zoe, tell me—I have a motive for asking you—how do you feel towards this man?"

"Father, I think of him as of no one else. He seems separated and set apart from all the rest of the world. *Every face* and form, *however beautiful, elegant, graceful, it may* be, seems to me common, vulgar, by the side of him."

"Yet, Zoe, he is not beautiful, elegant, or graceful?"

"I am not a coward or a fool, am I father? yet when he comes into the room—"

"Well?"

She sank her voice to its lowest tones, and murmured—

"I tremble all over; and sometimes talk nonsense, without knowing what words I am using."

"And sometimes, Zoe, you laugh and talk with him cheerfully and sensibly enough."

"Yes, sir! but, father! *that* is when he chooses to be gay; but if, in the midst of that gayety, he suddenly stops, and only looks me in the face, I fall into gravity, life becomes very serious, very solemn, very *real* to me. Mirth seems mockery, laughter seems levity. No other man's eye affects my soul so, father."

"This is a very painful influence, is it, Zoe?"

"Oh, no, father! It is deep, sweet, solemn, like a church chant."

"Zoe!"

"Well, father."

"You love Brutus Lion, and you can never become his wife."

"Father!"

"*Never*, Zoe."

"But I did not expect, I did not hope to; I am sure I did not."

"He is of an old and haughty family—you, Zoe, are a foundling."

"I know it," murmured the maiden.

"Yet you, in your secret heart, hoped that this might be overcome; that he might stoop to lift you to his level—on your truth, did you not?"

Zoe bowed her head lowly, sadly.

"He is wealthy, you are penniless; but you thought never of this as an objection, but believed that his superfluities might supply your deficiencies. Ha, child?"

Again she bowed her head, slowly, lowly.

"All this might happen, Zoe—the patrician might stoop to the plebeian; the millionaire to the beggar. Brutus Lion might offer his hand and name in marriage to Zoe, yet Zoe can never be the wife of Brutus Lion—"

"Father!"

"*It is true.*"

"Father!"

"It is fixed, inevitable, irrevocable."

"*Oh!* father."

"*Zoe!*" said the old man, rebukingly, "has he ever asked you to be his wife?"

"No, father," said she, speaking with more spirit than usual, as if in defence of one whose honor she felt was in some way implicated in this conversation; "no, father, but he *will*. He loves me, father, although he never *has* said so in set terms. What indeed would be the use of *set terms* between us two? I deceived myself only in thinking that he ever *said* so, not in the fact itself; and, father, I honor him. I believe in him, if I believe in any person or thing in heaven or on earth. But, how am I talking! oh! dear father! how am I talking! It is so strange, is it not, for me to be talking so! But you draw every thing out of me, father. Well! go on."

"You love Brutus Lion; he loves you. He will offer you his hand; you will accept it. Yet you will never be his wife."

"Father—will *you* object to it?"

"My child—*yes*."

"Again, father—*why?*"

"An insurmountable obstacle to your union exists, my dear," said the old man with the tears dimming his eyes."

"*Father*," said Zoe, in a suffocating voice, "father, I am a foundling, as you say—do you know or guess—that I am of—of—very near *kin* to Brutus?"

"You are no kin to him, Zoe; but it is not less certain that you can never, *never* be his wife."

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CHAPTER XIII.

BRITANNIA.

Around her playful lips do glitter
Heat-lightnings of a girlish scorn;
Harmless they are, for nothing bitter
In that dear heart was ever born.
That merry heart, that cannot lie
Within its warm nest quietly,
But ever, from the full, dark eye,
Is looking kindly night and morn.
Willis.

"This lady's arrogance grows intolerable, insupportable, insufferable!" exclaimed Britannia O'Riley, flinging open her chamber-door, entering hastily, and walking up and down the floor in excitement.

It was after some such scene as that of the drawing-room, described in a former chapter.

"She treats me with more hauteur than she shows the lowest of her slaves, for the simple reason that she thinks it impossible one of them should presume on her clemency, and she fears it is quite possible *I* might! I cannot endure it! this slow, cold, snow-fall of petrifying pride, congealing, as it descends. I wonder it does not dampen and chill me! I wonder it does not freeze me into apathy—into death! Or I *should* wonder, if I did not recollect that the avalanche of ice and snow heaped on Vesuvius's summit does not quench the fire in its bosom, does not prevent it breaking out into a blaze, and burying a city or a province in its lava! I am on the eve of an irruption, and Herculaneum (which is Mrs. Armstrong) does not know it. Yes; Mrs. Armstrong kindles the fire in my bosom, fans it to flame, and I tremble on the verge of an explosion every moment. I shall blow out soon; I know—I feel I shall; and then how the hot fire of my anger will fuse, scorch up, and annihilate this lady's pride."

Brighty's strong melo-dramatic mood was foaming up; effervescing into comedy already. Her good humor was returning.

"After all, I would not mind it if I could entirely keep my temper. It is unpleasant to remember that I have said sharp, sarcastic things to a lady of her age and standing—and she *is* a lady, with all her grave faults; and grave faults they are, capable, I sometimes think, of leading to great crimes."

She paused and turned around, facing a picture that attracted, magnetized her. It was Cordelia, with her fair brow, serious eyes, and sweet lips. She gazed deep down into the face, spell-bound.

"There is a filial piety free from the superstition, the morbid excess, that characterizes that of our Louise. Cordelia could live, labor, or die, for her father, but could not flatter one weakness of the old king. I wish I had your *meekness*, Cordelia, as well as your frankness; then I should be able to bear this lady's haughtiness better than I do.

"I go to church Sunday morning, and I hear a good sermon, and I come home thoughtful, fully determined to conquer my own spirit, to get a victory over my besetting sin. Well, I am gentle all day. At night, lying awake, I act over all the scenes in which Mrs. Armstrong is certainly to play the supercilious—I, (possibly,) to play the meek and lowly in spirit. *Very* well. Monday, I keep guard on myself. Tuesday, I grow tired of the sentinelship. Wednesday, Mrs. Armstrong does or says something offensive to me. I am on fire; I forget meekness; I only remember courage, spirit, heroism, and I give her, in return, a small hint of what I *may*, and, I am afraid, *shall* give her one of these days, if I do not grow in grace faster than I am growing. I would there were preaching three times a week. I cannot remember to be good from one Sunday to another. Or I wish, oh, how I wish, some middle-aged preacher had married me when I was fifteen. I am afraid a preacher would have a terrible home with me *now!* And yet this is a poor way to pass life. Even suppose I shall live to be threescore and ten. I have passed one-third of that time, and what have I done for God, for my neighbor, or even for myself? *Nothing!* I wish I could be sure that I had been of any real service to Louise in teaching her to read bad French and worse Italian. But I know that I have not. Here I am, lingering on, because the elegant luxury of this establishment pleases me; because I can enjoy it as if it were my own. I wish I were not so enslaved by this love of ease and elegance. I would go somewhere where I *would* be of use. How I admire the self-resignation, the ascetic self-denial of the Sisters of Charity. Ah me! I love Cordelia's meekness, and can't be meek. I admire Sister Mary's or Sister Martha's self-devotion, but I can't be self-devoted. A bundle of fine sentiments have I, instead of good principles. How long is this life to last? It cannot last long; at least, this Mont Crystal chapter, for Louise is nearly sixteen, and I think her mother will not want my services much longer. And then where? Ah! that strikes me pleasantly; fancy is free to roam all over the earth for another home. 'The world is all before me, where to choose.' The uncertainty is pleasant. Shall I next live in a hilly country or a level one?—in the interior or on the seashore? Shall I go north, south, east, or west? At any rate, what new faces, what new landscapes, shall I see? Yes, this vagrant, *respectably* vagrant life, is vastly agreeable. *So* agreeable, that I wish to redeem it by great utility. Yes, 'my lines are cast in pleasant places;' this is a free, careless life enough. The vagueness of the future is *piquant;* truly I would not resign the gay liberty of my present life; *nothing* would tempt me to resign it but the prospect—no, the certainty of taking the head of some splendid palace as its mistress. Truly there is something of the gipsy in my disposition; I am a blending of the empress and the Zingaro. Ah, I have it. It is known that the west of Ireland, from whence I come, was settled by a colony of Spaniards, ages ago. Now, I know that I am *descended by many generations from one of the old sovereigns of the soil* and a Zingaro emigrant, or squatter, and hence comes my love of elegant palace-houses, and also the wandering liberty of wild nature. No, nothing would tempt me to leave this pleasant, governessing life, with its piquant varieties, and uncertainties, and unexpected crises, except the invitation to take the head of just such a splendid palace as that upon the Isle of Rays. Mont Crystal is a magnificent place, but the Palace of the Isle is something to go crazy about. And now I wonder why I am always dreaming of that Island Palace. I never dream of its inmates. Surely I have no half-formed matrimonial design on Louis Stuart-Gordon, the boy heir of the Island Estate. I am only a poor governess, without an eagle left in my purse, yet I should not accept the hand of Louis Stuart-Gordon, were the honor tendered me to-day. I would not take the Island Estate, with that encumbrance, delicate and elegant as he is, or rather, because of his elegance and delicacy. I have elegance and delicacy enough myself for two people, and consequently, he who marries me, must be rough enough to make *strength* supposable, or I'll none of him. Therefore, I am innocent of all covert designs on Louis Stuart-Gordon. Now, then, why is it, that whenever I call up images of my possible future homes, no picture but that of the Isle of Rays rises at my summons? Ah, now I know the reason. It is an epidemic among all the marriageable girls of the Valley, for a hundred miles around, and I have involuntarily caught the infection; that is it! I must get well. Ah! there is Kate Jumper passing into Mrs. Armstrong's chamber; a privy council to be held there; I wonder upon what subject. Happily, it is none of my business." And Brighty began to make her evening toilet, and was soon absorbed in the interesting occupation.

CHAPTER XIV.

KATE JUMPER.

> You shall find her the infernal Ate in strange apparel. I wish some scholar would conjure her.
>
> *Much Ado About Nothing.*

Let us accompany "Kate Jumper" into the chamber of her mistress, whither she had been summoned.

There was something sinister, appalling, almost spectral, about the look of this woman.

She was a mulatto of the tallest altitude, in whose face the negro features were not only decided, but grossly exaggerated. The low, receding forehead was lower and more receding; the nose larger, flatter, broader; the lips thicker, and more protruding even, than usual. Her goblin-like appearance was enhanced by a head of hair, never cut, that grew out an immense black bush all over her head; by her dress of dusty, black stuff, and by the man's hat that habitually surmounted the black bush. Kate Jumper was the loathing of all the neighborhood, and the terror of all the children. She had been the confidential attendant of Mrs. Armstrong in her early youth, and ever since her marriage she filled that important post. She *had* been the nurse, and now also acted as the maid of the young girl of whom her mother took too jealous care to intrust her in the hands of another servant.

Doffing her hat and setting it down at the door, Kate Jumper entered the chamber of her mistress, whom she found at her evening toilet, Louise, as usual, sitting on a low chair near her.

"My daughter, go and sit with your governess until she is ready," said the lady, on seeing her maid enter.

Louise arose, lifted the hand of her mother respectfully to her lips, and left the room.

The lady brought her attendant to her side by a gesture. Resigning the arrangement of her gold-colored Irish gauze turban into the hands of her maid, she continued some time in silence. At length she inquired, with seeming indifference—

"Do you know where young Stuart-Gordon is, and what he is about, just now?"

"He is still at home, at the Isle, madam."

"Ah! I had not seen or heard of him lately, and fancied that he had left the neighborhood. How does he amuse himself at the present time?"

"They say that he is going to see Miss Somerville."

"How!" exclaimed the lady, turning around so suddenly and sharply as to throw into chaos the elegant folds of the head-dress under Kate Jumper's hands. But quickly recovering her composure and dignity, she inquired quietly—

"*They* say so! *Who* say so?"

"It is the common report of the whole neighborhood, madam. Every one says that it will be a match."

"*And upon what grounds do they, everybody, assert such impossibilities,* such absurdities?"

"*Madam, Mr. Stuart-Gordon* spends every forenoon at The Crags; Miss Susan Somerville comes every evening to make tea at the Isle."

"How long has this gone on?"

"For the last two weeks, madam."

"And Mr. Stuart-Gordon has spent every forenoon, for the last two weeks, at The Crags?"

"Yes, madam."

"And Miss Somerville has come over, every evening, to tea at the Isle?"

"Yes, Madam."

"Inexplicable! And no lady—no matron—to countenance her visits?"

"No, madam."

"Disgraceful! *What!* do you mean to say that she made these visits *alone?*"

"Not alone, madam; Harriet, her housekeeper, attended her."

"No proper attendant on such an occasion; and, indeed, no proper attendant could have been found, the visit itself being highly improper. How is the General supposed to look upon this strange proceeding?"

"He is very fond of Miss Susan Somerville."

"He offers no impediment to this proposed marriage?"

"No, madam."

"You may go."

Kate Jumper left the room, and the lady fell into profound thought.

Mrs. Armstrong was no vulgar, manœuvring match-maker, yet she had silently and naturally betrothed Louise to Louis, from her very cradle, and there seemed every sort of propriety in such a betrothal; the fitness of relative age, rank, wealth, proximity of estates, &c. And there were many strange coincidences in their circumstances. Both were only children, both were sole heirs, both were born on the same day of the same month—the maiden being just two years younger than the youth. The coincidence extended even to their names—Louis and Louise. They were devoted to each other as children. Their birthdays were celebrated together. One year, the festivities would be held at Mont Crystal; the next year at the Isle. The parents of these children would have thought it almost sin if they had supposed that, in after life, either would have thought of wedding any but the other; but, though the thought of the future marriage of these children and these estates was ever in the hearts, it was never on the tongues of the parents, the practice of betrothing children in their cradles never having existed in Virginia, aristocratic and conservative as that patrician State is known to be. This is not saying, however, that in Virginia lands are not more frequently married than *hearts*, and that *love-matches* are not held in especial contempt—"*love* being a sentiment that Thomas, the coachman, feels for Betty, the housemaid, and which generally ends in converting the said Thomas from a genteel servant into a slovenly brute, and Betty from a neat-handed Abigail to a haggard slattern, beaten by a drunken husband, and dragged at by ten squalling children." *Love* is not a gentlemanly or a lady-like propensity. Southern aristocrats, however, leave this to the instinct of nobility supposed to be resident in the bosoms of their young patricians, and, therefore, would never think it necessary to take advantage of the nonage of their children, to bind them by such contracts if they could. Least of all, would Mrs. Armstrong, withheld by a sentiment of pride—or the Stuart-Gordons, restrained by principle—least of all would *they* have affianced their children in infancy. Still it was in the minds of both. The annual celebration of the birthdays was kept up, and a competition of splendor, as to who should distinguish the day with greatest magnificence, interested the families of Mont Crystal and of The Isle of Rays. The very last celebration of the birthdays was held at The Isle of Rays, gentle Margaret Stuart-Gordon presiding over the festival. This was just a month before her sudden death overwhelmed her bereaved family with sorrow, the whole neighborhood with gloom.

We have seen that Mrs. Armstrong possessed one master passion, PRIDE; one predominant affection, MATERNAL LOVE. The sovereignty of her soul was a di-umvirate, and the two powers that divided it were equally potent, and for a long time united, pride being firmly wedded to, and highly flattered by, the favored object of her maternal affection. But, as Louise approached womanhood, these passions began to conflict, thus—

The time was slowly but surely approaching when it would be proper for the heiress of Mont Crystal to be married. Her *pride* was interested in seeing her married, and established as the mistress of the most magnificent mansion and the greatest estate in the valley, and pride, enlisting policy on her side, would suffer no delay, run no risk of the loss of this desideratum. But her *maternal love*, if the fierce, selfish, and exacting passion deserved the name, rebelled against this decision. Pride would have been highly gratified by seeing *Miss Armstrong*, as Mrs. Stuart-Gordon, mistress of the Island Palace. Maternal love was grieved *at the anticipation that her daughter should become the wife of Louis*, maternal jealousy aroused by the thought that Louise should derive the happiness of her life from any other than herself. It is true, the mother coveted for her daughter no happiness that did not flow through herself. It is true, the thought of seeing Louise in another home, united to another—a more genial, a more beloved, a life-long companion—of seeing her surrounded by an infant family, which with her husband should occupy the largest share of her thoughts and affections—of feeling *herself* the mother of one only child, becoming of less and less importance to the happiness of that child, as year by year went by and aged her—this thought inflicted upon her selfish heart the sharpest pang it was capable of feeling. Could she have conquered pride, resign the thought of establishing Miss Armstrong, and even selfishly determine to indulge her maternal jealousy, and keep her daughter for ever unwedded and at home—*or*, could she have subdued her maternal jealousy, and gratified pride by seeing Louise at the summit of her ambition—in a word, could one or the other of her evil passions have obtained the mastery of her soul, she would have been a less tortured woman. Hell is the less intolerable for having but *one* sovereign. If it be the consummation of all horrors to our conceptions *now*, what would it be in civil war?

Mrs. Armstrong could not or would not put an end to the civil disturbance; it was not *yet* civil war in her own soul. Not from indecision—no one had a stronger will when she pleased to exert it—but from a selfish, grasping wish to derive the greatest amount of gratification from both her ruling propensities.

She was resolved that ultimately Miss Armstrong should become mistress of The Isle of Rays; yet, as her daughter's proposed husband approached manhood, she conceived a strong and growing aversion to him, as the person destined to divide with her her place in her only child's heart, her influence over her only child's life.

Her manner had grown cold to Louis. She had discouraged the intimacy of the children, and the estrangement increased with years, and was interrupted only by the annual birthday festivities. Since the death of Margaret Stuart-Gordon, the estrangement had become total—a dead silence fell between the once closely connected families, a silence broken at last by the strange rumor of Louis—

"Fools!" silently sneered the lady, as her attendant retired; "Fools! Do they really suppose that General Stuart-Gordon for a single instant contemplates the possibility of his only son, Louis, the sole heir of the great Island Estate, marrying a penniless girl, an uneducated rustic, like Susan Somerville? Little would General Stuart-Gordon feel flattered by the construction placed by the neighborhood upon his politeness to Miss Somerville, and that, by the way, should be a lesson for such mistaken civility and indiscriminate association. No; there is not in all the mountains a proper bride for Louis Stuart-Gordon, save *one*—my daughter, Louise Armstrong; no eligible match for the heir of the Island Estate, except *one*—the heiress of Mont Crystal. I had supposed there was time enough"—, and a shadow fell, softening the hard brow. "I *had* supposed that there was time enough—that Louis needed not for some years to come think of matrimony, since he will not be eighteen until the 22d of next February, when my daughter will have completed her fifteenth year. But it seems that, since the death of Mrs. Stuart-Gordon, the Island palace is supposed to need a mistress, that General Stuart-Gordon has expressed a strong desire that his son should marry early, and give it one. Louis is very young, too young. General Stuart-Gordon's tastes are strictly domestic. He wants a home, and thinks that, in his regal palace, he cannot have one without a woman. Bad! foolish! If Louis does not make a choice soon, *he* will—he *will*—he does not think so, but *I* know it. He thinks now only of eternal fidelity to that 'ascended saint,' as he calls his deceased wife, but already he has ceased to groan and sigh after his saint in heaven, and begins to feel that *he* is still on earth, with all earth's wants pressing upon him. He will be mad enough to think of a second marriage. I wish Mrs. Stuart-Gordon had not thought proper to die—her death has disturbed the economy of my plans very much. The late Mrs. Stuart-Gordon *was* a lady, and it really does not suit me to see an inferior take her place as the head of an establishment my daughter is one day to enter as a bride. She might be one with whom I could not associate; she might be young, and so keep Louise half her life in a subordinate position in the household. I could not endure that! Miss Armstrong when she enters that house Mrs. Stuart-Gordon, must take the head of the establishment. But I am not disposed soon to part with my only daughter; yet, a crisis approaches—one of three things is likely to happen: General Stuart-Gordon may marry—that is the first contingency; or press Louis to make choice of a wife—that is the second; or Louis may have conceived a boyish passion for Susan Somerville or some other equally ineligible girl, and all girls are ineligible in my estimation, except one young lady. Louis *had* a decided preference for Louise. I have estranged them lately, since the decease of Mrs. Stuart-Gordon. Well! I do not regret it—I would not cheapen my daughter—nevertheless, *now* is the time to change deportment. Mrs. Stuart-Gordon has been dead eight months. It is to be presumed that the first violent effects of grief have passed away; that the bereaved are willing now to be amused. The doors of Mont Crystal have been closed to festivities since the decease of the lady of the Island Palace, out of compliment to the Island family. The portals of Mont Crystal must now be thrown open to visitors from the Isle. The palace doors of the Isle must swing apart, to give entrance to the ladies of Mont Crystal, when they shall occasionally make a call. The friendly, the intimate association of the families must be resumed. Now is the favorable time to commence. Christmas approaches. Christmas festivity shall again enliven Mont Crystal. I will invite a Christmas party to the house—give a ball and dinner. For once, I will invite the Somervilles. I wish to observe for myself the terms upon which these two young people appear to be. Yes, I will gather all the young people of the neighborhood, many of whom I have not seen since they reached womanhood, and I will take note of any possible rival my daughter may have—but, what do I say? Louise Hector Armstrong must have *no* rivalry, must enter into no competition;" and, rising, the lady entered her private sitting-room, and, ringing the bell, sent the servant who answered to request the immediate attendance of Miss O'Riley.

Brighty entered three minutes afterwards.

"Sit down, Miss O'Riley. I have been planning some amusements for my daughter."

Britannia looked interested.

"In accordance with your advice, Miss O'Riley."

Britannia bowed in acknowledgment of the compliment, and silently awaited further communication.

"I shall invite General and Mr. Stuart-Gordon, Major and Miss Somerville, to spend Christmas week at Mont Crystal."

Britannia smiled to herself when she heard General Stuart-Gordon's name, and started with surprise as that of the interdicted Susan Somerville met her ear.

"As our party will be a Christmas one, it is not strictly necessary that we be exclusive. All may unbend a little at Christmas."

"Certainly," assented Miss O'Riley.

"During their stay, I shall give a dinner and ball, and it is in relation to that, more particularly, that I have requested your presence. Will you have the goodness to sit down at my writing-table, and make out, at my dictation, a list of guests to be invited."

"With great pleasure, madam," said Britannia, taking the indicated seat, and, dipping her pen in ink and laying a sheet of paper before her, she held herself in readiness for the task.

A list of about thirty names was made out, and Britannia absolutely dropped her pen and stared in astonishment when the thirty-first name given was Gertrude Lion, and thirty-second, Zoe Dove. What does Mrs. Armstrong mean? Was she converted? Was she going to die?

"You look shocked, Miss O'Riley, and I am glad to see that you *do*. I *had* feared that you favored those young ladies to a degree that I should disapprove in Miss Armstrong's governess. I am glad to see that the idea of inviting them to Mont Crystal displeases you."

"No!" said Brighty, "surprises me. I had not expected—"

"Such a proceeding on my part. Perhaps not. Yet, as my contemplated party is to be quite a large one, it is not obliged to be very select. There will be several guests at the ball that I would not upon any account invite to Mont Crystal upon any other occasion, and these young ladies are among the number. Yet they are of thoroughly respectable parentage, whatever they may be in other respects. Nevertheless, Miss O'Riley, I shall expect you to keep your pupil separate and at a distance from these persons."

Britannia bowed coolly, and presently asked—

"May I inquire, Mrs. Armstrong, if there be any thing affecting the moral character of these young women?"

"Assuredly *not*, Miss O'Riley. My inviting them to Mont Crystal at *any* and under *any* circumstances should be a sufficient guarantee that they are stainless, unimpeachable. Why do you ask such an irrelevant, such a singular, I had nearly said such an impertinent, question?"

"I could not conjecture the reason why you dread the contagion of their proximity so much, unless there were some pestilential moral malaria evolved from them," said Brighty, with assumed *naïveté*.

"*They—at least Miss Lion is eccentric*—has been distinguished by a *sobriquet*. Zoe, though sufficiently refined and intelligent, of course has no claims of equality—and the order of rank is to be observed, Miss O'Riley."

Here such a decided curl twisted the pretty upper lip of Brighty, that Mrs. Armstrong observing it, said, haughtily—

"At least, Miss O'Riley, Miss Armstrong's mother disapproves of the acquaintance, and has undoubtedly a right to object to certain associations for her daughter."

"*Most* certainly," assented Britannia, and gave her attention to her work.

When the list of about a hundred names was complete—

"Now, Miss O'Riley, will you oblige me by writing cards of invitation addressed to each name of your list?"

Miss O'Riley bowed compliance, and the lady, rising, withdrew to have a consultation with her housekeeper.

A Christmas party at Mont Crystal! This was something new under the sun! It disturbed somewhat the majestic solemnity habitually reigning at Mont Crystal. Mrs. Armstrong was engaged; Brighty excited; even the pale, wan, spiritual Louise became childishly interested in the new dresses selected for her for the occasion—dresses that were to be made *long*, as ladies wore them—the first dresses that she had ever had made so. Her pale, gold hair was to be combed out of curl, trained up around a comb, and dressed with sapphires; the plain gold hoops in her ears were to give place to sapphire ear-rings; these things had been sent for; and in short, Louise understood that "Miss Armstrong" was about to "come out" at the ensuing Christmas. *That* was another subject of excitement among the household, who, from Kate Jumper, the prime-minister, down to the tiny mulatto-boy, whose office it was to wait on the governess—some from affection, some from mere love of any circumstance that might vary the monotony of their lives, took a lively interest in all affairs of the family. All were busy, all were happy. The only clouded brow was that of Mrs. Armstrong, who walked majestically through her superb rooms, giving orders with the air of an undertaker directing a funeral. Her occasional appearance in the still-room, (the room set apart for preserving, pickling, distilling, &c., is thus called in old Virginian mansions,) cast a damper on the spirits of the housekeeper and her assistants, who were engaged there in preparing confectionery for the coming festival.

A Christmas party in a Virginian planter's house! Do you know what that is, reader? I advise those who do not, to set out immediately to the Valley—this is the proper season—and get their limbs dislocated on the detestable roads—the turnpikes are now in a proper trim for such catastrophes—and get picked up and carried into some planter's house, for the sake of being a cherished guest in the coming Christmas holidays, and to have an opportunity of getting over their prejudices against Virginian aristocracy. You who have never visited Virginia, (a Summer trip to the White Sulphur Springs is *not* visiting Virginia, to know it, any more than a trip to Nahant is making a Southerner *au fait* to the character and habits of New England)—you who have never visited Virginia, have no conception of what Virginian hospitality is. It reminds one of the feudal ages, when the ox was roasted entire, whole pipes of ale broached, (I beg pardon of total abstinence,) and the baron's gates thrown open to all comers—when hospitality, with a flag of truce, arrested for a time all neighborhood feuds. You, who live in cities, and sneer at Old Virginia and F. F. V's, (*all* are *not* F. F. V's who pretend to be so,) have no conception of what a Virginian planter's family at home *is*. You, who provide your families from market-stalls, grocery stores, confectioners, and so forth, have no idea of what a *real* Virginian housewife of the first class is—of what Virginian housekeeping, Virginian cellars, larders, and still-rooms are. Their hams, smoked beef, &c., are quite different articles from those you buy in stores: and their milk, cream, and butter—and their poultry and eggs—are such as you seldom see in market. Virginian matrons have an old-fashioned pride in their housekeeping. Why, they have been preparing for Christmas for weeks past! And such stores as they have to prepare from! There is little to be bought—every thing is at hand. The still-room closets furnish the dried fruits, the preserves, the jellies, and even the domestic cordials, wines, and essences—it is for the preparation of these things that the still-room has been set apart. The dairy supplies butter, milk, and cream; the domestic hen-house gives the eggs, large and fresh, the poultry-yard supplies the turkeys, geese, and ducks—they have been fattening for a month past. Then in the meat-house, the great Christmas round of beef has been down in spices for weeks, and the huge Christmas ham is already cured, and the Christmas pies *are in fine order.* There will be great doings in *Virginian country-houses* this blessed Christmas. There will be huge bowls of egg-nog brewed before breakfast, and every negro on the plantations will come up to wish a merry Christmas, and to get his glass of brandy, and will come to breakfast with something extremely extra. And then the family will go to church in the old family carriage, and perhaps bring the preacher, if he is a single man, home to dinner. The afternoon will be spent in jollity, and the evening will close with a dancing-party. They are great dancers in the country, with an old negro officiating as a fiddler—for even a first family cannot at all times command a band of music, if they are resident away up in the mountains, or hidden in remote valleys. So it will be some "old Uncle Ned," or "old Uncle Ben," who "play the fiddle for the ladies." By the way, you could not go into a Maryland or Virginian neighborhood, where there was not some fiddling Old Nick or old Harry, who was the musical wonder of his small world—a perfect Paganini in ebony—and whose services were always in great demand on merry-making occasions. You would be surprised at the musical genius of some of these old negroes. There, Christmas week is the slave's Saturnalia. Those who have been hired out, come home: their year is out on Christmas Eve, and all have a holiday until the 2d of January; that is, all except a few that are needed about the house, and even they take turns in going out.

We digress. Let us return. There will be great doings at all Maryland and Virginian country-houses this season; but none, I will venture to say, will approach in splendor the Christmas festivities that will celebrate the coming out of the youthful heiress of Mont Crystal.

CHAPTER XV.

THE CHRISTMAS PARTY AT MONT CRYSTAL.

Fill the bright goblet! Spread the festive board!
  Summon the gay, the youthful, and the fair!
Through the loud hall, in joyous concert poured,
  Let mirth and music sound the dirge of care!
  But ask thou not if happiness be there—
If the loud laugh disguise convulsive throe,
  Or if the brow the heart's true livery wear;
Lift not the festal mask!—enough to know
No scene of mortal life, but teems with mortal woe.
Scott.

In Maryland and Virginia, from a religious sentiment, or from a superstitious observance, most persons choose to eat their Christmas dinner at *home*. Therefore few invitations to dinner on Christmas day are accepted, unless it be in the case of the young married sons and daughters, who meet to dine at the house of the head of their family. For this reason, the party invited to spend the holidays at Mont Crystal did not assemble until the day after Christmas. Mont Crystal and its inmates were in great state to receive their guests. The gold-fringed curtains, hanging from the central arch that divided the two apartments, as folding doors divide them now, were drawn up with golden cord and tassels into graceful festoons, thus throwing the two rooms into one magnificent saloon, glowing with its subdued crimson lights and shadows. Far down the gorgeous vista, and deep in the burning gloom of its extremity, was the recess of a large bay window, whose rich drapery of crimson velvet, fringed with gold, swept finely down on either side of a luxurious sofa placed below. Beneath this gorgeous canopy, and amid the piles of crimson satin cushions, reclined the beautiful form of Miss Armstrong, attended by her governess. Never was a greater contrast in beauty than that presented by these two young girls, as their figures were thrown out into beautiful relief by the crimson background of their seat—both so charming, yet so unlike. Louise, reclining, with her fair, transparent complexion, with her mild blue eyes and pale gold wavy hair, with her fragile and drooping form arrayed in white muslin as soft and pliable as her gentle disposition; Britannia standing, with her fierce blue-black eyes, her glistening black tresses curling down her snowy forehead and carnation cheeks, with her stately figure, attired in a rich dark-green brocade, embroidered with a deep border of variegated flowers—a dress dignified as her own spirited temper. They were a beautiful contrast. Britannia was handsome—Louise, pretty. Brighty was elegant—Louise, graceful; Brighty was brilliant—Louise, gentle; Brighty, stately—Louise, graceful; Brighty was witty and satirical—Louise, benevolent and confiding; Brighty, audacious—Louise, timid; Brighty lived chiefly on her intellect—Louise, on her affections; in a word, Brighty was fascinating—Louise, lovely.

Far up the other end of the saloon, and facing the main entrance, stood Mrs. Armstrong, her majestic form arrayed in the sweeping folds of a black velvet robe, her rich, abundant hair confined in a black bugle net. On her right hand, attending her and occasionally conversing with her, stood a young man in the black dress of a clergyman. He was of a delicate form; a thin but highly intellectual face, with his pale broad forehead softly shaded by fine, thin, silky black curls. His manners were gentle and courteous, and his voice soft and sweet. This was Willis Lindslay, the nephew of Mrs. Armstrong, and a student in the Theological College of ——. He had come down to spend his Christmas at Mont Crystal, and now stood with the lady to assist in receiving her guests. The visitors, as they in succession alighted from their carriages, were received by the porter, who, throwing open the hall-door, passed them into the care of a servant stationed there to attend them to their respective rooms. Thence, after having arranged their toilet, they passed into the saloon at the entrance of which Mrs. Armstrong received each guest with the stately courtesy of a Virginian lady of the old school. First—as punctuality with a lady and hostess was a chivalric virtue of that old gentleman—came General Stuart-Gordon, with his erect military air. He advanced with a deep, slow, reverential bow, met by the lady's slight imperial bend, as she said, graciously—

"General Stuart-Gordon, you are most welcome to Mont Crystal."

"I am honored in becoming once more the guest of Mrs. Armstrong," replied the aged Chesterfield, with a second and deeper reverence, as he gallantly took the place on her left hand, after slightly, *en passant*, acknowledging the bow of the young clergyman.

"Mr. Stuart-Gordon, we are happy to receive you. My daughter, Miss Armstrong, will be pleased to see her old schoolmate. You will find her at the other end of the room," smiled the lady, as Louis Stuart-Gordon entered, and she gracefully passed him on. Louis immediately and gladly sought Louise. Next came old Major Somerville, with his venerable head thinly scattered over by a few silver hairs on the temples, with his form bowed and tottering with extreme old age, as he leaned on the arm of his grand-daughter, the calm Susan. Mrs. Armstrong advanced to receive the patriarch with more than usual courtesy.

"Major Somerville, it affords me pleasure to see you at my house. The ladies of our family have long missed the good and wise counsels of their oldest neighbor, and best and most venerable friend! Miss Somerville, you are welcome; my daughter will know how to value the privilege of your society, having lost it so long. Mr. Lindslay, Miss Somerville is looking weary; do me the favor to give Major Somerville the support of your arm to a comfortable seat."

The old gentleman bowed low, with the reverential gallantry of the olden time; Susan slightly bent her head, and the veteran and the maiden passed on, conducted by Willis Lindslay.

"Ha, ha, ha! ha, ha, ha! ha, ha, ha!" were the peals of laughter that, ringing out like silver bells from the hall, broke upon the decorous silence, startled the stately composure, and shocked the august propriety of this ceremonious reception.

"Ha, ha, ha! ha, ha, ha! ha, ha, ha!"

Every one in that superb room paused, looked towards the door, listened!

"Ha, ha, ha! ha, ha, ha! ha, ha, ha!"

Mrs. Armstrong drew herself up in awful majesty.

"Ha, ha, ha! ha, ha, ha-a-a-aw," rung out the musical laughter—approaching—screaming—shouting; and Gertrude Lion burst into the midst of them like a ball discharged from a cannon.

The effect of her *entrée* was petrifying. Each member of the company was arrested in the attitude in which he or she happened to be standing or sitting.

While they stood transfixed—enchanted—I will describe this girl—this savage beauty, as she stood among the conventional circle assembled at Mont Crystal.

There she stood, nearly six feet in her gaiters, of so finely proportioned form that every attitude and gesture displayed the most charming grace, blended with the most enchanting originality. Back from a brow white as sculptured marble, flowed locks of glittering gold rolling and flashing far down upon her blue riding habit with the freedom and strength of a lioness' mane; the large clear eyes of Saxon blue, blazing with an intolerable light impossible to darker orbs. There she stood, with the laugh arrested on her lips still scintillating from her eyes, as though it would explode, with one hand holding up her riding habit—with the other grasping her whip. There she stood, with the majesty of Juno and the freedom of Diana blended in one form of astonishing perfection; there she stood, caring as little for the startled hauteur of the august lady of *Mont Crystal* as *Queen Vashti* cared for the *dignity of the inebriate king*; there she stood, silent *for one moment*, while they paused, spellbound by her beauty and audacity. Then catching up the frozen white hand of the proud "ladye," she exclaimed—

"How do you do, Mrs. Armstrong?—ha, ha, ha! Excuse me, it is too good—Brutus wishing to learn Greek for love! Think of a lion in love—a lion put to school! Were you ever in love, Mrs. Armstrong? Were *you*, General Stuart-Gordon? How does it feel, I wonder? I fancy it is a sort of intoxication not unlike that produced by alcohol—certainly I know it makes people talk nonsense and run their heads against a post." And so rattling on, the savage girl sprang through the dignified circle, fled up the saloon, and caught and crushed Britannia in her strong arms before Mrs. Armstrong had chosen to relax the frozen rigidity of her stiff face and form. Her cold, steel eye followed the girl as she shot away, then, turning deliberately to her companion, she asked, in measured accents—

"Can you inform me, General Stuart-Gordon, why that young woman is permitted to go at large? By sanity, implied from her freedom from constraint, inflicting upon the neighborhood the necessity of recognizing her?"

"The Lions are eccentric—startling—but Mrs. Armstrong has self-possession and forbearance," was all the reply that the gallant General would attempt, and it was made with a grave bow. The "self-possession of Mrs. Armstrong" had received a thunder-shock, but it had maintained its perpendicularity; not so her temper, for when the next couple, which was our old schoolmaster and his adopted child, came forward, she merely received them with a cold bow, as she swept aside to let them pass. They were followed closely by Brutus Lion. Brutus Lion was "metamorphosed with a mistress," certainly. He wore a suit of new black cloth, and his straight, black elf-locks were combed out and pomatumed until they shone with a purple lustre. He was the last arrival. The guests had observed a punctuality in accordance with the honor due to, and exacted by, the haughty mistress of Mont Crystal. Immediately after the last arrival, the dinner-bell rang.

"Will General Stuart-Gordon lend me the support of his arm to the dining-room?" said Mrs. Armstrong, in the tone of one giving a command that conferred a high honor, as it *did*. The General acknowledged the honor by a stately and reverend bow, and, taking the tips of the lady's kid glove in his hands, led her reverently, at arm's length, across the hall to the dining-room. There were no familiar locking of arms between a lady and gentleman in those stately days. The company followed in couples, and to the astute Mrs. Armstrong the order in which the company came to the dinner-table afforded a good clue by which to trace the mutual attractions of the young people. Finesse in concealing preferences until the last moment from the world was not in vogue among the young men and maidens of that day and neighborhood. Nearly all the young people of the same rank in that sparse neighborhood were collected in that saloon, therefore the state of their friendships might be guessed by their selections of partners. Mrs. Armstrong had taken her place at the head of the dinner-table, General Stuart-Gordon standing at her right hand. She watched covertly the *entrée* of her guests. What was her mortification when Miss Armstrong entered, led by Willis Lindslay, the student—the poor cousin—the *beggar*, whose every attitude, gesture, tone of voice, and expression of countenance, involuntarily betrayed his devotion to her—what was her consternation when Louis Stuart-Gordon followed with Susan Somerville, his pale, intellectual countenance irradiated, bending down to hers, and listening to her words, as though he lived upon the light of her beautifully serene face, and the deep, sweet tones of her musical voice. Mrs. Armstrong saw no farther of her guests. The other couples might come as they listed, her mind was too absorbed in the study of this annoying *contretemps*. It was well that her servants were properly trained to their business, and that the service of the dinner-table went on with great propriety without her for a few moments while she recollected herself. It was well that Mrs. Armstrong, however inwardly discomposed, could never be surprised from her self-command.

When the last couple had taken their seats at the table, she sank majestically into her chair, and the dinner commenced. It was an almost interminable affair. I will not tire you with the three courses—the stately compliments of the gentlemen, the dignified reserve of the ladies—nor of the firm resolution formed by Mrs. Armstrong as she saw, without seeming to see, the poor cousin's worship of Louise—the devotion of Louis Stuart-Gordon to Susan Somerville. The most annoying thing to her was the thought that it was not possible, with any sort of propriety, to manœuvre and prevent the young people returning to the drawing-room in the precise order in which they left it, or even to prevent their *tête-à-tête* afterwards, until the hour for dancing arrived. Thus, when the company left the dining-room for the saloon, she had the pain of seeing Willis carried off to a distant recess by the simple-minded Louise. who wished to show him a collection of rare shells and fossils, and Susan Somerville enticed away by Louis to look at a fine original Titian, representing a gorgeous autumn landscape. In another corner of the room, General Stuart-Gordon and Brutus Lion were standing before a sofa, upon which sat Britannia O'Riley, with Gertrude on her right hand and Zoe on her left. These five persons were engaged in a lively conversation as Mrs. Armstrong sailed majestically towards them, hoped that they were amusing themselves, and then blandly requested Miss O'Riley to say to her pupil that she was standing too near the window. Britannia understood, not only all that was *said* by the tongue, but all that was *meant* by the look. She withdrew herself from the circle, and sought Louise, at whose side she remained the rest of the evening. Mrs. Armstrong then turned from the sofa—General Stuart-Gordon offering his hand to attend her across the room. This was precisely what she wanted—to interrupt the *tête-à-tête* of Louise and Willis, and to obtain, without formally demanding it, a private conversation with General Stuart-Gordon, with the intention of calling his attention, in a diplomatic and dignified manner, to the fact, of which he seemed entirely unconscious, namely—the decided preference of his son and heir for the penniless Susan Somerville. Having suffered herself to be seated in a large arm-chair; and having, with a gesture full of graceful *hauteur*, indicated her wish that the General should assume the seat on her left, bending graciously towards him, she said—

"I earnestly congratulate you, General Stuart-Gordon, upon the happy prospects of your son——"

"Madam?"

"His choice does high honor to his intellect and heart."

"Pardon me, Mrs. Armstrong; I am not sure that I understand you."

"Miss Somerville is a young lady of great good sense and amiability."

"Really, my dear madam, you must pity and forgive my stupidity; I am utterly at a loss to comprehend the full bearing of the subject of your conversation."

"I speak, of course, of the approaching marriage of your son."

"Of my *son*, madam?" repeated the old gentleman, with a deprecating slowness and softness, as though his manner implored pardon for the rudeness of his repetition.

"Of your son, Louis."

"The approaching marriage of Louis, did I understand you to say, madam?"

"Yes, General, I congratulate you upon the approaching marriage of your son, Louis."

"May I inquire with what lady his name has been associated, madam?"

"With the name of a young lady every way worthy Mr. Stuart-Gordon's regard—with one of the most ancient names in the country—with that of Miss Somerville. I had named her in the commencement of our conversation."

The General started with surprise, then rooted his eyes upon the carpet, then looked up, seeking Louis by a sweeping glance through the room.

"I had not dreamed of this!" he exclaimed, in a tone of deep regret, as his eyes fell upon Louis and Susan Somerville, in a close and apparently very interesting conversation upon that crimson shaded sofa at the extremity of the saloon.

"Mrs. Armstrong!"

"General Stuart-Gordon!"

"Will you pardon me for inquiring your authority for speaking of the possible, or probable, union of my son with Miss Somerville? Do you merely suspect it from your observation of the parties, or have you heard it?"

"The report is common in the neighborhood, and the deportment of the young couple seems to confirm it."

"Madam, there is not one word of truth in this report of the marriage engagement *at all*—not one word, I assure you, upon my soul's honor," said the General, with great emphasis.

"Yet there seems to be a decided preference in that quarter," smiled the lady, with a successful assumption of good humor.

"No, madam! *no—no*—not so! a mere friendship, I assure you; mental affinity, &c. Miss Somerville looks upon him as a brother—Louis regards her in the light of a sister. No, madam, no! I think I am advised as to the preference of my son. I think I know what sweet flower, what delicate snow-drop, Louis Stuart-Gordon would fain place in his bosom. I know at what shrine the orisons of Louis Stuart-Gordon are offered," exclaimed the General, with earnestness; and, rising, with a profound bow, he sauntered forward to arrest, or at least to make a third in the conversation of Louis and Susan. As he approached them, he looked *covertly* but keenly at each, and took note of the following facts, namely—that Louis was now conversing in a very free and disembarrassed manner upon general subjects, and that Susan, usually so calm, was looking down upon the geranium she held in her hand, and now visibly trembling in every nerve—her cheek, always so white and cool, was now warm and flushed—her eyes, ever so serenely clear and open, were now downcast, each gemmed with a tear-drop, quivering to its fall. "My son has won the heart of Susan Somerville, whether he wished to do so or not," was the comment of the old man, as he stood before them. Then, taking his seat on the opposite side of Miss Somerville, he began talking to her in a lively and complimentary vein, and so completely threw Louis out of the conversation in which he had been engaged. They had no word together the remainder of the evening. Thus Mrs. Armstrong had at last, in the face of all difficulties, discovered every incipient flirtation, and successfully manœuvred to arrest them.

By reason of the number of guests at Mont Crystal, General Stuart-Gordon and his son occupied separate beds in the same chamber. When they had retired to their room, General Stuart-Gordon commenced, in his fatherly and affectionate manner, to banter Louis upon the subject of his affection—not for Susan Somerville—he was determined to be blind, deaf, and dumb, upon that affair when with Louis, unless it should be forced upon his attention in a manner that should compel him to take cognizance of it—but upon the matter of his old childish affection for Louise Armstrong. This was with a view of discovering the true state of his heart; for General Stuart-Gordon by no means felt the assurance upon this subject *now*, that he had expressed when speaking upon it with Mrs. Armstrong.

"What is the matter Louis between you and Miss Armstrong? You did not speak the whole evening, I think."

"Father, Louise has been, by her mother, I think, frightened into avoiding me. Within the last few weeks, whenever I have chanced to meet and speak to her, at church, at the village, or elsewhere, she has exhibited such terror and distress, that I could not, and cannot, find it in my heart to persecute her with annoying civilities. I merely made my bow this evening, on first entering the room, and then I retired."

"Do you like Louise, Louis?"

"Our lives, from infancy up, have been knit together, father. My heartstrings are inter-laced with hers. The withdrawal of Louise's heart tears mine."

"So you really do like Louise?"

"*Like* her, father!" exclaimed the young man, in a tone of deep emotion.

"Yes, like her. Well, *I* like her too; like her every way. She is the very bride I should select for you, if I had that privilege. Therefore, marry her, and receive my blessing," said the old man, rubbing his hands.

"But, my father, Louise avoids me."

"Wouldn't give a cent for a girl that didn't."

"When I enter the room she leaves it!"

"Follow her out."

"She hates me."

"Love her."

"She will certainly reject me."

"Then marry her. Nonsense, Louis, do not you know that every woman is an Atalanta, and flies only to excite the ardor of pursuit?"

In the very next room to this, but separated by a wall so thick as to prevent the passage of the sound of conversation, another confidential interview was held between a parent and child. Mrs. Armstrong and Louise were alone in their bed-chamber, for Louise had always shared the sleeping apartment of her mother. Mrs. Armstrong had sunk into an easy chair, and Louise had seated herself on a low cushion by her side, with her head resting upon her mother's lap. Mrs. Armstrong's ice-like face had almost thawed, her marble-like features were almost flexible, as here, in the privacy of her bed-chamber, she conversed with her daughter, seeking — alas! it was almost too late—to win the confidence of the child whose innocent revelations of herself had been repulsed and driven back, until all her thoughts and feelings were closely, timidly inclosed in brain and heart. There was too much fear and dread blended with the love of Louise's idolatry of her mother, to admit of perfect sympathy and confidence. Mrs. Armstrong's favorite maxim was, that "familiarity breeds contempt;" and so she had "guarded her strangeness" all but too successfully. Now, as she sat there, with the head of Louise for the first time since infancy laid upon her knees, and while she ran her fingers through the pale hair, she would have given much for an hour of the warm, free, full intercourse of mother and daughter; but the natural flow of confiding affection, repeatedly checked, congeals at its fount, and is not so easily unloosed *by the sunshine of sympathy* as the ice-bound *waters are by spring.*

"My daughter it appeared to me that your manner was cold to Louis."

"Was I wrong, mamma? Indeed I wished to do right."

"You *were* wrong, Louise."

"I wish I ever knew what to do! Dear mother, am I not stupid? I try to do well, and am always doing ill. How is that? I was wrong in conversing with Louis on the ground some weeks since, and I am wrong in *not* conversing with him now. I am afraid, mother, that I have a very feeble understanding—have I not?"

It was just now, in this exigency, that Mrs. Armstrong divined the difficulty of making a rational and responsible moral agent of one, out of whom she had crushed all freedom of thought and feeling.

"My daughter!" she replied, in a slightly subdued tone, "my daughter, 'circumstances alter cases.' Miss Armstrong in her own halls must display a courteous hospitality to Mr. Stuart-Gordon as her guest. And," continued the lady, sinking her voice to a still lower and more confidential key, "*Louise* must console *Louis*—must win him from the melancholy that still so darkly colors his conversation and manners—my daughter!"

"My dear mother!"

"You did not reply to me. Understand, Miss Armstrong, that I wish you to be *amiable* to Mr. Louis Stuart-Gordon."

Louise bowed her head, in reply.

"Now, my love, ring the bell for Kate, that she may come and put your hair in curl."

Louise obeyed.

This act of commanding a girl to be sympathetic was in perfect keeping with Mrs. Armstrong, who did not understand sympathy. But in the course of a few days the astute lady, perceiving that her presence imposed the greatest possible restraint upon the manners of her daughter, gradually withdrew herself as much as possible from her neighborhood, and covertly watched the progress of her drama. She withdrew herself, and *into* herself, and a dark shadow of gloom, bitterness, and reserve settled upon her countenance. Her soul was an instance of a kingdom divided against itself. The destiny she had designed for her daughter was certainly approaching. Yet, as it drew on and on towards its consummation, the cloud darkened blacker and blacker upon the brow of the mother.

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CHAPTER XVI.

SUSAN SOMERVILLE.

They seem'd to those who saw them meet,
  The worldly friends of every day;
Her smile was undisturb'd and sweet,
  His courtesy was free and gay;
And yet if *one* the other's name
  In some unguarded moment heard,
The heart you thought so cold and tame
  Would flutter like a captive bird.

Milnes.

To the morbidly fastidious nature of Louis Stuart-Gordon, there was something extremely repulsive in the idea of the interference of a third party in his wooing, even when that third party was his father, and well-wisher in his suit. Handling, however tenderly, brushes the down from the wing of the butterfly—love. He found a difficulty in courting "to order," even the girl he loved. "Marry Louise"—he wished no less; but now, if he did but speak to her, look at her, he felt himself *watched*—watched with a solicitous affection, with a *bon voyage* to his suit, it is true, but still *watched;* and his delicate Cupid folded its wings, tucked its head beneath one, bird fashion, and would have composed itself to sleep but that an incident roused and alarmed him. This was the assiduous attentions of Willis Lindslay to Louise—to *his* Louise—his delicate flower—his sheltered exotic, whose greatest charm for him was her rare crystalline purity from the contact of the world—from those frequent, so-called, harmless, but really debasing flirtations, in which the aroma of a girl's first affections are apt to be exhaled—from those pressures of the hand, glancings of the eyes—from those sighs, and tears, and whispered tones of love, that, breathed upon his flower, would have carried off its dew, and withered its freshness for him. You will smile, reader, but it is a fact that Louis Stuart-Gordon congratulated himself that his little lady-love had neither brother nor father to familiarize her with what his morbid delicacy termed coarse caresses—nay, that even her mother was too cold and proud to touch the polished brow of the girl with her lips. True, vitality had been *chilled* within her, but it was not dead—he could warm her to life again—and such a life of love! These had been the thoughts, wishes, and intentions of Louis Stuart-Gordon. Now, however, his divinity was in danger of losing in his eyes some of her exclusive glory; ever close by her side, stooping to her ear, and whisper- g in a low and love-tuned voice, stood Willis Lindslay. How he sped in his wooing it was impossible to tell, from the habitually subdued and quiet manner of Louise.

The life, the sting, of jealousy, is its *uncertainty.* Where there is assurance one way or the other, the passion may become love and joy, or it may become despair or revenge, but it ceases to be *jealousy.* How dissimilar, in unlike natures, are the manifestations of passion and emotion. How various, in different subjects, is the pathology of jealousy. In the bosom of Louis Stuart-Gordon, its rise was slow, sorrowful, rather than sudden or angry, disposing him to self-immolation, rather than to vengeance.

"If Louise, my darling Louise, falls away from the affection of her infancy and childhood, of all her young life—if she has ceased to love me, and has given her heart to this happier cousin of hers—why then—what then? Shall I dim her joy with the knowledge of *my* sufferings? No, Louise! that may be demon-love, but it is not angel-love—it is not even human love. No, Louise! I would not cast the shadow of another cloud upon that young brow—too overcast already. No, darling Louise! be happy—and God give me some other way of contributing to her happiness. I will even enrich that poor, young cousin, if his poverty stand in the way of your union, Louise! I will be the unseen providence of your happiness, Louise; and then—and then!—a *short life,* God! oh, God! a *short life!*"

So saying, Louis Stuart-Gordon, with the thought of the happiness of *one* being absorbing his mind, went straight to make the misery of *another.*

There are more mistakes made, more sins committed, more wrongs done, by mere *thoughtlessness,* than by all the evil propensities and malign passions put together.

There was in the soft seeming form, serene countenance, and quiet tone of Miss Somerville, a mesmerizing influence that possessed the power of composing the most turbulent emotions of the most disquieted souls that approached her. I believe she could by her look and tone have calmed a maniac. How healthful was her influence upon the morbidly excitable temperament of Louis Stuart-Gordon; but, oh! at what a fearful price she imparted it! When the diseased woman touched the hem of the Saviour's garment, Christ felt "virtue *depart* from" him. The health that healed the sick, the strength that raised the feeble, departed from the Saviour—and how ill and weak it left him in Gethsemane! How ill and weak, until "angels ministered unto him, strengthening him!" It is not irreverent to say that the life of the humblest disciple has its type in the life of Christ!

Grief for the loss of his mother, separation from Louise, *ennui*, *tedium vitæ*, the maturing and the disquiet of energies that had not yet found their proper direction, the youthful want of love, rather than love itself—these were the mixed motives that first drove Louis to seek solace in the company of Susan Somerville—little dreaming that, while he was *gaining* from her, health, strength, and cheerfulness, that she was *losing* the same to him. Her soft manners were so soothing to him, how *could* he deem that the peace that was falling upon *his* spirits was departing from *hers?* That, in benefiting him, she was growing to love him; that, in loving him, she was losing her old tranquillity, her independence, ay, for a while the very power of guiding her own life. And so, day after day, *thoughtlessly* he had visited her, sat by her side, read, conversed with her, until his society became a habit, a necessity to *her*, in proportion as his returning cheerfulness rendered hers needless to *him*. Now, at Mont Crystal, he sought again the society of Susan Somervillle as a balm for the deep wounds his heart had received in the supposed defection of Louise; and he met again the same sweet welcome, the same gentle glances and soft tones that ever fell, like cooling dew, upon the fever of his spirits.

And Susan—how fared it with her? Calm, cool, and wise, in all other affairs, in *this* she was but too blind. She had suffered her heart, not head, to interpret the meaning of Louis's constant visits—his long tarrying—his earnest glances—and his breathless listening for her words—and even as Zoe had received the silent manifestations of her lover's regard in all confidence so Susan accepted the tacit friendship of Louis, translating it—*love;* and if she lost her serenity, and grew hurried and agitated, it was, as yet, rather with hope than with fear.

It was under these circumstances that, upon one morning about a week after their arrival at Mont Crystal, Louis sought the side of Susan Somerville. The family had not yet assembled to breakfast, and she was the sole occupant of the drawing-room. She was seated upon that crimson sofa at the extremity of the saloon. Louis entered, slowly sauntering towards her, *and took the seat by her side,* dropped his head *upon his open palms,* and murmured—

"Susan, dear Susan."

"Louis."

That was all she said, but the round, full, melodious tone in which that single word was breathed might have stilled the tumult of a tempest.

"Susan, I have need of thee—I have need of thy affection; give it me, Susan. Here! lay one cool hand on my brow, the other on my heart—so. Susan, I have neither mother, sister, nor love; and I do need some *woman's* affection so much—give me yours, Susan."

"You have my best love—you shall have my best efforts to promote your happiness, dear Louis."

"Thank you, my dearest sister—thank you, Susan. Alas, Susan, you will despise me; I am growing sentimental, maudlin, mawkish; I am beginning to despise *myself.* Susan, give me the secret of *your* cheerfulness—of the cheerfulness of all the people I see around me. How is it that they live without a great love, Susan? How do they fill up their hearts? Why cannot *I* do so? Is it for the want of good mother wit, good strong common-sense, Susan, that I moan my heart out because a young, pale, frail, trembling girl does not return my love? Tell me, Susan."

Susan Somerville had been startled by the commencement of his last speech, had grown pale as it progressed, and at its conclusion she replied, in a sinking voice—

"I do not at all understand you, dear Louis."

"Ah, my *sister* Susan! I love and adore Louise Armstrong, while she has given her heart to another; pity me, Susan."

"I *do*, I do *indeed*," murmured Susan, in a dying tone. "But I pity you because you are blind; she does *not* love any one except her mother."

"Are you sure of what you say, Susan?"

"Very sure of it, Louis. And now I must bid you good morning."

And so saying, the girl arose and left the room. Meeting a servant, she requested him to have Major Somerville's horses saddled and brought around.

Susan Somerville passed on up the stairs, her smooth white cheeks a shade paler, her quiet step a degree slower, her calm voice a tone lower—these were all the signs the most acute observer could have discovered of the darkness, coldness, desolation, that had fallen upon the poor girl's life. I know that this word "desolation" is strong—is hackneyed. Yet, let the reader remember that a first disappointment in the affections, falls upon the young heart like the knell of a doom more terrible than the death of the body—a spiritual annihilation. To them the destruction of their love hopes is indeed despair, "desolation." They have seen the sun set for the *first time*, and have no experience to teach them that it will rise again. They have seen vegetation blighted by a *first frost*—rivers and brooklets frozen by a *first* winter, and they have no knowledge that flowers will bloom and waters flow in a second spring. Ah! no; the darkness of perpetual night, the coldness of eternal winter, the agony of an infinite void, seems within and around them. The long weary years of life, stretching out towards the future, seem too terrible to bear. Death would be welcome to the most cowardly during this heart-sickness. So felt Susan, as she passed slowly up the stairs, without a single thought in her mind, with only the feeling of a horrible nightmare of the spirit weighing her down. She could not *think*, she could only *feel*. She could not wonder why the sunlight, glancing through the window on the stair-landing, fell gloomily upon her—why the distant shouts of Gertrude Lion's laughter grated harshly upon her ear—why the flashing of Britannia's purple satin dress, bright ringlets, and sparkling face, as she bowed and smiled her hasty good morning, in crossing the upper passage, struck painfully upon her—why all gay sights, merry sounds, happy surroundings, were suddenly in discord with her—jarring, grating, torturing her nerves. She did not *think*, she only *felt*. It is at a long distance that one can look back and analyze emotion—reason upon feeling. Instinctively and mechanically she closed the window shutters of her room, laid down upon her bed, and doubled the pillow around her head, and in the deep darkness and profound silence of her chamber, her whole consciousness of existence merged into one absorbing sense of loss. The alarum of the breakfast-bell did not arouse her. Half an hour after it sounded, a soft hand laid upon her hand that clasped the pillow over her ears, a soft voice murmuring close by her side, caused her to put aside the smothering pillow, and look up. Her maid, Anna, who had attended her to Mont Crystal, was standing by her side, now looking with sad surprise at the disordered dress, dishevelled hair, and pale face of her mistress.

"You are ill, Miss Susan," said she, taking her hand, and looking with earnest affection at her fallen features.

"No, Anna," replied Miss Somerville, rising upon her elbow. Anna looked at her keenly, incredulously, then in her turn growing very pale, she inquired, hurriedly, earnestly—

"*Have you heard from The Crags?* Has any thing happened there, Miss Susan?"

"No, Anna, nothing. And now, Anna, do not question me further. Don't look distressed, Anna; I am *not* displeased with you, my dear Anna—and I—but I am very, very, very tired of every thing and of almost every body." And Susan Somerville slowly arose, gathered up her long hair in her hands, let it fall again heavily with a deep sigh, and finally resigned herself into Anna's hands, to have her toilet rearranged for breakfast. Immediately after breakfast, Susan Somerville intimated to her grandfather her desire to return home; and, on receiving his consent to the proposal, announced to her hostess their intention of returning to The Crags.

Through the delay of Major Somerville, their departure was deferred till after dinner, so that it was nightfall before they found themselves ascending the rocky acclivity leading to The Crags, and it was pitch-dark when they alighted at the door. Susan went at once to her room, to change her dress; and Anna, after helping her aged master to disencumber himself of his great coat and leggings, and after handing him his dressing-gown and slippers, and settling him in his dozing chair, went out into the kitchen, and taking her mother aside, said—

"Mother, Miss Susan is very unhappy about something. Some sudden grief has fallen upon her. Mother, what is it, and what can we do to relieve her? Miss Susan is wretched! Indeed she is!"

"Anna, perhaps she has discovered the ruin that threatens us every hour!"

"No, indeed she has not; far wide of it. She knows her father is in debt, at the mercy of his creditors; but she does not know how near, how imminent, how inevitable, our ruin is. No, thank God! she does not yet know; for even when I forget to guard myself, when I manifest anxiety or grief, the dear girl ascribes it to my *condition*, as if I could *realize* it in her gentle service! She thinks I am self-seeking and ambitious. She does not know me. No, mother! some other deeper sorrow preys upon Miss Somerville's mind; and it is you, mother, who must tell me how to comfort her; for you have lived long, and know every thing—I know nothing."

Harriet was kneading dough. She paused in her occupation, and seemed to reflect; then she asked—

"Is Mr. Stuart-Gordon at Mont-Crystal?"

"Yes."

"Was he attentive to Miss Susan?"

"Yes."

"What do they say about him there?"

"That he has long been engaged to Miss Armstrong, and that this Christmas party is in honor of their renewed betrothal."

"I feared so! Miss Somerville needed a mother to watch over her. After all, a nurse—one in my position—cannot meet every want in a young lady's daily life. But, now, listen, Anna. We must keep our young lady quiet, comfortable, and occupied. Subdue every thing to soothe her excited nerves. Let no sunlight into her room. Do not let the fire blaze too brightly—keep all loud noises far from her—temper even your own services for her, so that they do not become obtrusive. And now, go and set the table, and make all things comfortable, my child."

The woman who gave this advice was no common, coarse-minded menial. The reader need not be surprised at this. Delicacy in perception of character and emotion, and in adaptation and manifestation of sympathy, is the result of cultivated affections rather than of educated intellect. And Harriet possessed the first in a large degree.

The Christmas party lasted a fortnight at Mont Crystal. At the end of that time, Louis Stuart-Gordon and Louise Hector Armstrong were affianced. Upon the strength of the new relations, Mrs. Armstrong was induced to accept the earnest invitation extended by General Stuart-Gordon to herself, Miss Armstrong and Miss O'Riley, to pass a few days at The Isle of Rays. It was while the family of Mont Crystal were staying at the Island Palace, that the marriage day of the youthful couple was fixed for the twenty-second of the next month, February, the anniversary of their birth, when Louis should complete his eighteenth, and Louise her sixteenth year.

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CHAPTER XVII.

BRUTUS LION.

His face is dark—not very quiet;
It seems like looking down the threat'ning mouth
Of some great cannon.

John Sterling.

"MAY *the devil fly away with Zoe! God bless her!" prayed and cursed* Brutus Lion, as hills and valleys sped behind his flying horse's hoofs. "*Drown* Zoe! for a blind kitten or a supernumerary puppy! What is *she*, a little quilt-piecing, carpet-sewing huzzy, that I should be worried by her? Is she a hunting-knife, a gun, or a game-bag, that I should wish to possess her? A shot-flask, or a powder-horn, that I should want her hung about my neck? A horn or a hound, a pointer or a setter, that I should need her every hour? Have I been so *used* to her, that I should miss her every moment? Confound Zoe! God love her! Is she either deer, fox, pigeon, or goose, that I should be for ever hunting her? Now this morning! a fine morning! a glorious morning! when my blood is heaving up like the sea at high tide—when Earthquake is champing the bit and pawing the ground—when Thunder and Lightning are snuffing the air—when the scent would lie so beautifully—upon this sublime morning created for a hunter—what am I about to do? By Nimrod! Going to school, to learn *ton, ti, ta.* No wonder Gertrude laughs at me. By thunder, isn't it! I, with my giant limbs and thick head, sitting down with my elbows on a table, and "Readings from Herodotus" before me. *Sink* Herodotus! Come! Enough of this nonsense! Fire the old schoolmaster with his pride and his Greekomania! I'll have done with this tomfoolery. I'll marry Zoe at once—and I'll see who'll prevent me! Then I shall have a right, as his son-in-law, or his *adopted* son-in-law, to support the old man, without having to learn lessons—devil take them! into the bargain, by way of saving his pride! I'll *marry* Zoe—*I will do it!*" thundered Brutus, bringing his hand down so heavily on the flank of his horse, that the beast bounded under him. Then, falling into a more thoughtful mood and a slower pace, he muttered to himself—"And Gertrude Lion, Satan fleece her! Gertrude, with her fierce blue eyes, her rolling yellow mane—that cataract of golden hair—and her shouts of laughter! Gertrude Lion, with her body of adamant and soul of frost, with her sneers, scoffs, and unbelief! Oh my God! I would give half my patrimony to any fine fellow who would win the love and break the spirit of that sister of mine—for without a doubt it would be doing her and me a service. But who could do it? Strong as a lion, wild as a chamois, aspiring as an eagle, and colder, harder, than any thing that *lives*—cold as an iceberg, hard as a rock, is Gertrude Lion! And she will not sympathize with me, will not love my Zoe, or agree to accept her as a sister. And my Zoe will not venture to encounter her scorn. Zoe is proud, the little wretch! as if *she* were called upon to be proud with *me*, or for *me*. Who, to see Zoe about her domestic affairs, would suspect the substratum of self-appreciation that forms the basis of her character, or suppose that she could say to *me*, ME, the last of the Lions—'Brutus, I am a *penniless* girl, and you a *millionaire!* I am a *nameless*, and you are Lion of the Lair. I am a foundling, a child dropped from the clouds, thrown up by the tide—parentless, forsaken, unclaimed. You are descended from a family that dates back to the Norman Conquest! Brutus, I can never be your wife! Mr. Lion, I am your very humble servant!' Think of the irony, the impudence of that! Just as though I had not the power—*I*, Brutus Lion of the Lair, to raise any girl, however humble, into the first rank. What a devil of a mistake in Zoe to foster proud scruples against 'entering a haughty family against the consent of any one of its members.' 'Any one of its members!' meaning no 'one' but Queen Gertrude. If *I* am satisfied, if *I* can overlook the obscurity of her birth, Zoe should be. If *I* am pleased, let *others*, meaning Mistress Gertrude again, *submit!* And *they shall*. I'll not put up, one week longer, with the schoolmaster's pride and Greek, with Zoe's self-esteem, or with Gertrude's arrogance. I love Zoe, and Zoe loves me; and that gives me a *claim* to her. That *love* is a deed of assignment written on her heart by the hand of Nature, and it is my warrant for taking her. Hold, eh, Earthquake! here we are!" exclaimed Brutus, bounding with a shock, to the ground, turning his horse loose, and striding on to the cottage.

He rapped, for etiquette, but, without waiting to be admitted, pushed the door open, and entered. The same bright, clean cottage—the same fresh, gay domestic carpet—the same blazing wood-fire—the same gentle, busy little housewife by its side. The only new feature was the pine table in the middle of the floor, with the schoolmaster's chair at one end, and with Greek books piled up on it.

"What, no one here yet—where is the old man, Zoe?" inquired Brutus, on seeing that she was the sole occupant of the room.

"Father has not returned from Major Somerville's, where he went yesterday evening. But I expect him every moment; and, as you see, his class has not yet assembled. Indeed, dear *Brutus," added she, "if it* were not for your *punctual attendance*, our class might be said to be broken up. Britannia does not come now; she is too busy, assisting Mrs. Armstrong to prepare for the wedding."

"What wedding?"

"That of Mr. Stuart-Gordon and Miss Armstrong."

"Those *children*—nonsense!"

"They are going to be married on the 22d of next month, the birthday of Louis and Louise."

"And how old will their reverences be then?"

"Louis will be eighteen, and Louise sixteen."

"And *I*, Zoe, am twenty-four; and *you*, Zoe, are seventeen. Come, see how much time we are losing. Zoe, my darling, to-morrow is *somebody's* birthday, or somebody else's; or, at all events, some other day is, if it is not mine or yours; therefore, Zoe, go to church with me to-morrow; will you?—say, Zoe, won't you? Just do, Zoe, that's a good girl. Will you? I'll take such good care of you, Zoe; and the cameo-colored pointer, and the old man, and the tortoise-shell kitten, too! say, Zoe, speak."

"Brutus."

"Brutus! Well? Ha? Brutus! What?"

"Brutus, you *know* I cannot."

"Cannot! Oh, nonsense, Zoe. Fiddlestick and the devil about 'cannot.' You *can*, you *must*. Listen, Zoe; I have not told you all *yet*. It is very comfortable at the Lair. Listen; *very* for you, and the old man, too; and the tortoise-shell kitten, and the pointer. The pointer I shall take under my protection. There is a quantity of rats for the use and amusement of the kitten, and such a lot of old books for the schoolmaster. Very learned books they must be, for they smell very musty; and listen, Zoe, I have not told you the best *yet*. There is an inexhaustible lot of old coats, cloaks, and trowsers, long past mending, of which you can make an infinite number of carpets, which will be the more interesting, because there is not a floor-carpet in the whole house at the Lair. Just think of it, Zoe. Gracious, Zoe, won't you enjoy yourself?"

Zoe sighed deeply, and answered, with a charming *naïveté*—

"Yes, indeed, Brutus; it would, as you say, give me great delight to reduce all that chaos into order—to metamorphose several barrels of old rags into several beautiful carpets, to cover your bare floors. It would all be very nice and very interesting, but you *know* I can't. Oh, Brutus, you *know* I can't!"

"'Can't,' 'can't,' it is all can't, I believe. Why can't you, then, if one may ask?" said he, going towards her, dragging his chair, sitting down by her, and putting his arms around her waist to draw her upon his lap.

She gently withdrew herself, saying—

"Brutus, I am in *earnest!* I am not a coquette, practising upon your affection. I am in earnest; therefore respect me, Brutus."

"Prude—peacock—rock—icicle!"

"None of the four, Brutus, but simply *serious*. I tell you that my adopted father says that an invincible obstacle to our union exists. That being the case, Brutus, you should consider me one set apart—a nun—and respect my isolation."

"'Invincible obstacle!' I wonder if you are my sister? Can't be—both my parents being dead twenty years. May be you are a leper, or subject of hydrophobia. Say, are you sound in mind and body, Zoe?"

Zoe laughed.

"How do I know! I sleep sound and eat hearty, and have a good memory and a good power of calculation; for the rest, I never should know I had a body, if I did not sometimes see it in the glass; and I should be unconscious of a mind if I did not sometimes overlook it."

"Perhaps you are too *high* for me—may be George Third's daughter; or too *low* for me—may be Kate Jumper's child. Zoe, have you any idea of what this 'invincible obstacle' is?"

"Not the slightest."

"Zoe, there is *no obstacle! I* say it, Zoe. The devil! Don't make me swear. What obstacle *can* exist, if I choose to look it out of existence?"

Before Zoe had time to reply, the cottage door opened, and the old schoolmaster entered.

"How do you do, Brutus? What! no one here but you?" inquired the old man, as he sank into the chair Brutus hastened to hand him.

"Where is Miss Lion—where is Miss O'Riley?"

"Miss O'Riley is particularly engaged at home, as I understand, and my sister is breaking in a colt to-day, and begs you will excuse her attendance; that latter clause is a lie, by the way," whispered Brutus to himself; "Gertrude never sent an excuse in her life."

"Excuse her—excuse her," exclaimed the old man, in a sharp and rasping tone; "excuse her! yes, I'll *excuse her attendance*, but not the payment of her fees. Her lesson will be charged all the *same as though* she had *received it.*"

Had a shell fallen and exploded in their midst, the astonishment, the consternation of Zoe could not have been greater. At the first words of his last reply, she had pricked up her ears incredulously; she heard his conclusion with dumb-founded amazement. Her old father—her simple, child-like, old father—grown mercenary. Her liberal father grown miserly. Her generous father grown exacting.

"Yes, you may look at me," continued the old man, doggedly drawing his chair to the fire, "you may look at me, Zoe. Brutus, get your lesson; you have nothing to do with gazing at my daughter. You may look at me, Zoe, but I am determined to turn over a new leaf, I am. I am determined not to be imposed upon any longer. I am determined to have *money, money, money!* And that reminds me, Brutus, that it is time for you to pay your second month, if you are going to pay it in advance."

Zoe looked at the old man, and then at the surprised and perplexed face of Brutus, and pressed both small hands together. Glad, perhaps, to have an excuse for leaving the hateful lessons, now that the presence of the old man imposed a restraint upon his conversation with Zoe, Brutus Lion arose to his feet, and reaching his hat, said,

"Yes, I forgot; this *is* the first of the month. Suffer me to return home, and I will bring my own and my sister's tuition fees for February."

"Yes, I suffer you; go, go," said the old man, holding open the door for him to pass.

"No, Brutus, no; don't go," exclaimed Zoe, springing past her father, and catching his hand. "Father is *ill;* he does not know what he is talking of. Don't you *see* he is ill?"

"Sit down, Zoe," growled the old man.

"I will return soon, dear Zoe," said Brutus, hurrying from the door.

"Oh, father!" said Zoe, dropping into a chair, "for you to serve Brutus so."

But the sight of the old man startled her. *He* had sunk into a chair, pale and exhausted, and tears were coursing down his withered cheeks. Alarmed for *him* now, Zoe started up and ran to him.

"What is it, father?—dear father, what is it?"

"Oh, Zoe, my child, my baby—my poor baby! if the Lord, in his mercy, would take him to himself to-night!"

"What *is* the matter, dearest father?" exclaimed Zoe, pale with a vague terror.

"Alas, Zoe, how much money have we got?"

"Enough to last two weeks yet, father—six dollars."

"Six *dollars!* My Lord, what is six dollars, Zoe?"

"Sir?"

"How much will this new carpet sell for?"

"Dear father, I am sure I do not know. It cost almost nothing, and I do not know how much the work is worth."

"We must sell it, Zoe; we must sell every thing that we can; we must get money. And," broke forth the old man, with savage energy, "my pupils! they *shall* pay me! I *will* have money!"

◆

CHAPTER XVIII.

BRIGHTY'S CONQUEST.

A brow half martial and half diplomatic,
An eye upsoaring, like an eagle's wing.
Halleck.

It was near the last of January before the family of Mont Crystal concluded their visit to The Isle of Rays and returned home. The day appointed for the marriage of Mr. Stuart-Gordon and Miss Armstrong drew near.

For weeks before that day dawned, the gloomy mistress of Mont Crystal had been preparing for it. She had been almost tempted, for the first time in her life, to leave her isolated palace-home, and subject herself to the annoyance of inconvenient packet-boats, ill-provided hotels, and hired domestics, and go to New York, for the sake of ordering a *trousseau*, incomparable for richness and elegance. Doubtless she would have done so, but that she had more confidence in Miss O'Riley's taste in such matters than in her own; and, remarking coldly to her daughter that "ladies' maids and milliners, and such people, understood the minutiæ of the toilet better than ladies could be expected to do," she placed Louise in charge of Miss O'Riley, and dispatched them both to New York, under the escort of General Stuart-Gordon, who was travelling to the North with no better excuse than that of ordering new furniture for the Island Mansion, and a set of diamonds for its future mistress.

Certainly, the arrogant assumption of Mrs. Armstrong strangely deceived her when she sent a beautiful, brilliant, and fascinating girl, with a decided taste for palaces in general, and The Isle of Rays in particular, travelling day and night through a fine and picturesque country, in charge of an elderly gentleman, with an eye for beauty and a soul for poetry, who was just beginning to feel the solitude of his own suite of apartments.

But Mrs. Armstrong quietly and tacitly assumed that no gentleman of *her* circle could see in Miss O'Riley any thing but "the Governess;" or rather, to speak still more correctly, Mrs. Armstrong never thought about it at all. She was entirely incapable of receiving such an idea. *She* never saw Brighty as she really was—a sparkling, dazzling, bewildering girl—radiating beauty—fascinating more from the soul of truth and goodness, ever burning through her face, than for any regularity of features, or brilliancy of complexion. No, she never realized the attractions of Brighty. She saw her through a mist—the cold, frosty mist of pride. Of course the image was dimmed to her vision; she saw "only the Governess." In that Mrs. Armstrong was alone. No one else viewed Miss O'Riley through a disparaging false medium. Mrs. Armstrong saw in Britannia nothing *but* the dependant; no one else could see the dependant *at all;* they could only see the native *lady.* There was nothing assumed, affected, or forced, about Britannia. Her habitual elegance and propriety of costume, dignity, and grace of manner, and brilliancy of conversation, were always the natural and truthful manifestations of her real character. Had Britannia crowned herself with rubies and diamonds, you must have felt, by all the correspondence, that they were made for her. General Stuart-Gordon also saw Britannia through a mist, but it was a brilliant golden mist, like that which illuminated The Isle of Rays on a gorgeous autumn morning. He saw her through this illusion, for he could not see the "Governess" *at all;* but then he had never seen her at her duties; had only met her in the drawing-room at Mont Crystal, or at The Isle of Rays, where she impressed him only as a very "queenly" woman; and his manner towards her evinced a respect approaching to reverence. And this, Mrs. Armstrong, in obtuse arrogance, mistook for a haughty reserve, or a more haughty condescension to the governess. Britannia, on her part, received all this veneration and deference naturally, as a matter of course—as her due; and without a single thought as to its reason or its result.

And Louise—poor little Louise—had a dim notion that Brighty was not positively hateful to her future father-in-law; and so, in her little faint heart, she feebly nursed a timid wish to persuade her governess to take up her residence at The Isle of Rays as her companion As yet, however, Louise durst not breathe this desire to any one. In fact, the poor, oppressed girl had never been known to give utterance to a wish of any sort in her life.

It was in these moods of mind that, upon the morning of the first of February, the three travellers set out in General Stuart-Gordon's carriage for the village of Battletown, where they were to meet the Washington stage.

Two days of stage-coach travelling, through a mountainous, then a hilly, and lastly an undulating country, brought them to Washington city, where they met the line of stages then running from the metropolis to New York. Those were not the days of railway travelling, and so it was quite a week from the time they set out from Mont Crystal until they reached the city of New York. Have you ever travelled two or three days in a stage-coach, with almost the same party? Do you know how much more sociable it is than railway travelling? How well acquainted people become the first day—how friendly the second—how intimate the third? These coaches were arranged with three seats for nine passengers. General Stuart-Gordon always occupied the back seat, between his two young ladies. Louise was timid, reserved, and silent. Britannia had to sustain the conversation. Britannia was seldom taciturn or out of spirits; always alive, awake, and keenly observant. Especially was she so now, in passing through a part of the country very picturesque, and entirely new to her. Not a smile of sunlight on the mountain-tops, not a frown of shadows in the valleys, not the singing of a single brooklet, not the laugh of a single waterfall, or the roar of a solitary torrent, escaped her notice. Nay, to her poet-mind and artist-eye, the very loneliest and rudest hut upon the road side, with children's little red flannel petticoats drying on its straggling fence, was picturesque in appearance, and interesting association—in it was a home—*somebody's home.*

General Stuart-Gordon first *heard*, and lastly *listened* to her talking; was first attracted, then amused, and finally deeply interested in her conversation. There was contagion in her poetry; it galvanized into new life all the long-forgotten enthusiasm of his youth. I lay it down as a general rule, subject to very few, if any, exceptions, that when love or fever attacks an *elderly gentleman, it makes* quicker *work with him than with a younger* one. The reason in the first case is obvious; they have no time to lose

"in wooing;
In seeking and pursuing
The light that lies
In woman's eyes."

I said, that at the *commencement* of the week of travel there was contagion in Brighty's romance; at the *end*, there was joy in the meeting of her eye—an electric shock in the contact of her hand. There was life, vigor, youth, buoyancy, in being packed into that back seat, between Brighty and Louise, (although little Louise was no more than a band-box or a bundle in the account;) and there was a relapse into despondency—ay, reality—in the separation; and in his rebellious heart he cursed the hour of evening that daily brought them to an inn door, and broke up the party for six or eight hours. For his part he preferred to ride all night; but Britannia, though never divining his motive to be the love of her own company, would not permit Louise to become fatigued. In this state of progress, the party reached New-York city. A week was spent among jewellers, milliners, and upholsterers, in the mornings; and at theatres, operas, and concerts, in the evenings. This was all very new and delightful to both the young ladies—as well to the timid Louise as to the witty Britannia; and for General Stuart-Gordon's part, he desired nothing better than to attend them on their shopping expeditions, or on the evenings' amusements. At the end of the week, having dispatched all their purchases by packet-boats to Alexandria, to be conveyed thence to their place of final destination, the travellers set out on their return home. It was now that the attentions of General Stuart-Gordon became so evident and pressing, that Britannia, communing with herself one night at an inn where the stage stopped, to sleep, thought—

"It is certain that I have been in very high spirits—yes, and high beauty, too, ever since we set out on this journey. I know I have been excited by the novelty of travelling, the sublimity of the scenery, the poetry of painting and the drama—ay, and the poetry of the *jewellers'* shops, too! I know that I have been enthusiastic, inspired, brilliant, sometimes; and I know that, almost isolated here with General Stuart-Gordon—for Louise is nobody—that I have, without intending it, won his good opinion. Pshaw! I will be honest with myself, and not affect a mock honesty to my own heart, his admiration. I know, also, without a doubt, that I admire General Stuart-Gordon, *I do.* He may be more than double my age, but *I do.* He is a good-looking old man—I mean a handsome and dignified elderly gentleman, with a magnificent air; and I admire his splendid palace home on The Isle of Rays, with its gorgeous furniture, its rare and costly pictures and busts, and its fine old library; *do* I not? And I should be well pleased to become the mistress of that paradise; oh, *should* I not? Yes, verily, *so* much, that I began to distrust the sincerity of my admiration for its master—for who shall know their own hearts? But I *do* know, also, that I never thought to win the admiration of General Stuart-Gordon; and I know, also, that though a gentleman, under any circumstances at all, very freely forgives a woman for setting her cap for him, and is, upon the whole, rather flattered by the same, yet General Stuart-Gordon must not be permitted to suppose that Britannia O'Riley would condescend to manœuvre for the heart and hand of a monarch. No, indeed; by the elastic pride of down-trodden Ireland and the O'Rileys, *never!*

"No, much as I admire the princely General, I adore Britannia O'Riley as she is now, *more*—highly as I prize the Island Estate, I prize Britannia's self-esteem more! I should lose this fine, swan-like curve of the neck and shoulders—this strong, elastic spring of the instep—this free, stag-like step—this natural and involuntary feeling of *royalty*—if I could cherish a mean thought or do a mean action? Certainly it would! Therefore, General Stuart-Gordon, if you are debating with yourself upon the relative policy and propriety of sacrificing your inclination or marrying the Governess, leave the conflict with yourself—be at ease—another shall decide for you. Or if, General Stuart-Gordon, you have decided to lay your fortune at my feet, with many thanks for honor intended, I shall decline it. The price would be my self-respect, my health, my beauty. And yet, I *do* admire that regal man; I should be proud of *him*, and there is no other man I know, of whom I *would* be proud! Certainly of none of the young men I see, who appear to me to be frivolous—heigh-ho! What are *you* thinking of, Louise?" she asked, suddenly turning to Miss Armstrong, who shared her chamber. Louise was sitting in her white wrapper and little lace-frilled night-cap, gazing into the wood fire, at which she was warming her feet *previous to going to bed*—a practice that her *mother had taught her, to* preserve the purity and delicacy of her complexion by drawing the blood from her head and face!

"What are *you* thinking of, Louise?"

"Of my mother, Brighty. She has, for many weeks past, looked so *very* gloomy, so severely; as if I had displeased her. What can be the reason?"

"You *have* displeased her, Louise—*unwittingly* displeased her. You are about to be married—"

"But she wishes it," interrupted Louise, with her eyes wide open.

"My dear," said Brighty, turning suddenly to her, "I remember hearing a story of a sect of Christians, who taking St. Paul's permission, or St. Paul's command, 'saluted each other with a holy kiss,' which was all very well, being a part of their worship. But one day, a young brother was expelled from the society for kissing a pretty sister, with an *appetite. Mrs.* Armstrong wishes to see *Miss* Armstrong at the head of a splendid establishment; and so Louise is about to exchange the cold and haughty affection of her mother for the genial love of her youthful husband; and so Louise, so long depressed, feeble, frozen, apathetic, almost dead, is beginning to warm into a little life, just as the flower-roots in the frozen ground do when they feel the first life-giving sun-warmth, in the early spring; and Louise betrays this in her looks and manner, and her mother is offended by it. It must be a trial to any mother, Louise, to give her daughter in marriage, even when she has a half score of them to provide for, or establish; even when she has strongest reasons for wishing it, and the most disinterested desire for her child's well-being. Yes, it must be a heart-trial to a mother to see her life-long, unselfish devotion superseded by another, a newer, and often a more selfish affection. To marry off her daughters, is a necessity, but it is a *cruel* necessity, under the present domestic arrangements of families, that separates parents and children at the marriage altar, separating them, sometimes, for thousands of miles, and sometimes without the possibility of meeting again; thus intercepting, by the dark cloud of parting, the sunlight of joy that should fall upon the head of the bride. It seems to me there might be some remedy for this evil; it seems to me that the brightness of the bride's morning should not thus be overcast—the evening of her parent's age not thus left desolate. There are seldom more than three generations on earth at the same time, and it seems to me that houses might be built large enough to accommodate three generations. And how united a family would be, then! What permanency, what security, what peace it would give them—the certainty that they need never be separated on earth."

"But Brighty, suppose that when a pair were married, the parents on both sides should dispute as to who should keep the young couple?"

"They should, in most cases, reside with the parents of the bride, for several reasons."

"For what reasons, then, Brighty?"

"Parents love their sons with more pride, more enthusiasm; but this does not make a parting with them very painful, when they send them to a happy destiny. But they love their daughters with *tenderness*, and suffer very much in dismissing them from their fostering bosoms, under the happiest circumstances. They know that marriage changes the whole phase of a woman's life—that it is a much more serious thing to a woman than to a husband. She is, physically, the weaker party, and in every conflict, or calamity, is most likely to be the greatest sufferer. Besides, a young wife, amid the toils and cares of a new maternity, ever needs the experience, advice, assistance, and sympathy of her own mother. And lastly, there is Scripture for it."

"Scripture for it?"

"Yes; from the first of Genesis to the last of Revelations, it is nowhere commanded that a *woman* shall leave her parents; but is very frequently written and rewritten, that a *man* shall leave father and mother, and cleave to his wife; and the reason and justice of this is obvious from what I have just said. I have often thought—as I think all sorts of things—that if I had a little daughter, the more I loved her, the more I should suffer in the thought of the approaching age when she should be taken from me; and I sympathize with all mothers, even with Mrs. Armstrong, who would consider it unnecessary, or insulting—for you are her only child, Louise, and she, perhaps, is not the most disinterested in her affection for you, and therefore is more jealous, exacting, unhappy, in her love—wanting the consolation that seeing you happy might give her. But you are weeping, Louise! Do not weep, Louise;" and the kind girl, regretting that in her love of talk she had wounded the daughter's heart, left her night toilet half completed, and went to caress and console her.

Presently she inquired, with a view of changing the *subject, and suggesting* a more *agreeable train of thought*—

"Do you love Louis, Louise?"

"Certainly I do," replied Louise, wiping her eyes.

"I do not believe it, you little child; you say it so composedly. Young ladies ought to blush when such a question is asked them."

"For what?"

"I don't know, but I know that you *comm*itted a breach of etiquette, when you omitted to be covered with confusion at my abrupt question. Therefore, I do not believe you love Louis according to established rules. Say—which do you love most—me or Louis?"

"Louis—but I love *you*, too," hastily added the gentle girl, taking the hand of her governess.

"Louis—or your mother?"

"Oh, my mother."

"I thought so! Unlucky Louise," said Brighty to herself. "The only reason, then, why you are miserable with your mother, and happy with Louis, is because the former is selfish, proud, jealous, and exacting in her affection, and the latter is noble and disinterested. Because Mrs. Armstrong constantly suppresses the manifestation of her maternal love, while Louis freely expresses his generous affection."

"But, Brighty, what do *you* know about love?" timidly inquired Miss Armstrong.

"Nothing, experimentally, Louise! Nothing, at least, of such love as exists, or is presumed to exist, between a betrothed couple. I have a sort of protecting affection for you, and a sisterly regard for Susan Somerville and Zoe Dove. That is the growth of time, association, and esteem; but for any other love—for the love that poets rave about—I know nothing of it, and I am twenty-five years old. I never wish to marry, except to attain my proper elevation in society, and to escape the unjust reproaches vented upon old maids."

"You would make a good nun, Brighty."

"Certainly! that would be a way of solving the problem. I might thereby attain a handsome establishment, and escape the odium of old maidenhood—winning the glory of self-sacrifice, instead. Yes, Louise, I think I might be persuaded to take the veil; I should make a very good nun, provided they would elect me Abbess, and set me at the head of a magnificent Abbey—always providing that the Abbey *should* be magnificent—the dress of the Abbey dignified and becoming, and the ritual of the sisterhood sublime. I will think of it, Louise."

Thus Britannia rattled on, to restore the cheerfulness of her pupil. Louise went to draw the window curtains, to shut out the full moonbeams that were flooding the chamber with silver light.

"Does the moonlight disturb your sleep, Louise?"

"Oh, no—never."

"Then do not shut it out, love; it is churlish to shut it out. I like, when lying awake, to gaze through the window at that glorious world floating free in space. And sometimes it seems to me a bright spirit, smiling a blessing in upon me." Louise left the blinds open and the curtains up, and the two girls retired to bed. They occupied the same couch. Neither fell asleep. Britannia's thoughts had reverted to the "to be, or not to be," of her own possibly brilliant destiny, and Louise was thinking of her mother. At last, at the end of half an hour, she said—

"Brighty, are you awake?"

"Yes, my child."

"Brighty, I am troubled about my dearest mother. How do you know that she is gloomy about my marriage?"

"Louise, I was wrong to say any thing to you upon the subject. My besetting sin is conversation; if I could not converse, I should have to scribble, and that would ink my fingers —think of something else, my dear."

"But, Brighty, you who are so young, and who have been without family ties of any sort, from your earliest infancy up, how is it that *you* can enter so deeply into the emotions of a mother parting with her daughter, a daughter leaving her mother; the relative and comparative nature of parents' love for their sons and their daughters—you, who were never a mother, and, I was going to say never a *daughter?*"

"You might have said it. I do not remember my parents."

"But how do you know a parent's heart, then?"

"In a small way, as Shakspeare knew a monarch's heart, a villain's heart, a woman's heart—he, who was neither a king, rascal, nor woman—by INTUITION. You do not know what the idea is that that very common word pretends to present. The lexicons define it by synonyms, without explaining it. *Instinctive* knowledge—*inspired* knowledge—what is it? whence comes it, then, Louise? It may be the answer, the sum total, of past experiences—the experiences without the memory of a pre-existence. Inspiration, Genius—what are *they*, Louise? They may be condensed; the *precipitated wisdom of* a long chain of many *links of past lives.* We sink into a reverie, we catch the gleam of a new ray of light, or the tone of a new prophetic voice; we seek it, pursue it eagerly, to lose sight and sound of it away down in the caves of our inner life, whither it has withdrawn. We watch, and wait, and listen, for the voice within to speak —for the light within to shine—in vain! It has died away in silence—died away in darkness—until some unexpected sight or sound, some merest trifle—the shadow of a cloud upon the hills, a cadence in the laughter of a child—brings back the ray in a flood of glorious light—brings back the voice in a diapason of sublime harmony. We call it inspiration—genius! May it not be poetical *memory,* rather —the recovery of lost knowledge and wisdom, without the recollection of its acquirement?" murmured Brighty, half awake, half asleep, sinking dreamily into unconsciousness.

"It is the *moon;* yes, of course, it is the full moon, falling on Brighty's head, that keeps her awake and makes her fanciful," said Louise, stepping out of bed and closing the blinds. Then returning to her couch, she changed her pillow and fell asleep.

The stage left the next morning, after an early breakfast. Brighty, on re-entering the coach with Louise and General Stuart-Gordon, began to put in practice her resolution of distant reserve. She was perfectly sincere in her intention to persevere in gently repulsing the General's advances; yet the most skillful coquetry could not have devised a better plan for bringing matters to a crisis.

The end of this day's journey brought the travellers to Baltimore. Here they designed remaining one day, for the purpose of seeing something of the city, and of making a few more purchases. They spent the day in walking or riding through the city, and returned to their hotel at night so fatigued, that the ladies retired to their apartment very early in the evening.

On reaching their room, Brighty observed on the toilet-table a small packet, addressed to herself, having the card of General Stuart-Gordon attached to it. She opened the packet, and found a casket; she raised the lid, and a beautiful set of jewels flashed into her eyes! First an exclamation of admiration and delight escaped her lips, as she held them nearer the light, to examine their brilliancy; but in the next instant she fell into gravity—raised the card and looked at it—then glanced at Louise, who was undressing in a distant part of the room, and quite unconscious of the treasures on the dressing-table—then she looked again in admiration on the jewels. They consisted of ear-rings, breastpin, necklace, and bracelet, of fine topazes. Lastly, she closed the casket, wrapped it again in its envelope, tied it securely, and taking writing materials from her trunk. stood there, and penned the following characteristic note :—

"Britannia O'Riley offers her earnest and most respectful esteem to General Stuart-Gordon, and solicits his permission to return the accompanying casket, with deep gratitude, and with this explanation:

"Britannia O'Riley's circumstances, by denying her the privilege of *making* costly presents, deprive her of the pleasure of *receiving* them."

When she had folded, sealed, and directed this note, she attached it to the top of the packet by slipping it in between the cords and the envelope, and rang the bell. A chambermaid answered it.

"Do you know the number of the room occupied by the gentleman who accompanied us hither?"

Yes, Miss; it is number twenty-six—the next room but one."

"Has he retired yet?"

"No, Miss: I have just seen him enter the reading-room."

"Then, if his door is open, take this packet and leave it on his dressing-table, and return and let me know when you have done so," said Britannia, handing the casket.

The girl took it and went, and in two minutes returned to report her errand accomplished.

"What was that, Brighty?" inquired Louise, as the girl left the room.

"Oh, only a purchase of the General's, left upon our toilet-table." And the girls retired to rest.

Early the next morning, and as soon as he had ascertained that the young ladies had arisen and dressed, General Stuart-Gordon rapped at their door, and, upon its being opened, offered his arms to the girls with an air of sad ceremony, to conduct them down to breakfast.

The passage of breakfast was rather amusing, could the spectator have been in the secret. The General was very grave, ate but little, and heaved great sighs as he buttered his bread. At the end of breakfast, both the young ladies arose to return to their *room, and get ready to resume their journey. But* General Stuart-Gordon stepped after them and arrested their further progress by taking the hand of Britannia, and inquiring in a low but assured tone if Miss O'Riley would grant him the favor of an interview. Britannia bowed her head in assent, and suffered herself to be conducted to the ladies' parlor, then vacant, and led with great deference to a seat.

General Stuart-Gordon, standing respectfully before her, said—

"Miss O'Riley, you have humbled me."

"I am very unhappy in having undesignedly *offended* you, sir," said Brighty.

"I said that you had *humbled* me, Miss O'Riley."

"The term is inadmissible, applied to General Stuart-Gordon. I would not hear my best friend use it in connection with your honored name."

"Miss O'Riley, I am humbled; you will restore my self-respect by the acceptance of the small offening laid upon your shrine."

"General Stuart-Gordon, you will pardon me, and permit me to adhere to a rule that circumstances make it necessary for *my* self-respect that I should observe."

"Then this seems to be a question of pride between us."

"Of *propriety*."

"Miss O'Riley, you are proud."

"Perhaps so, sometimes, and with some people."

"Arrogant."

"Never."

"Disprove the charge, then, by receiving from a friend a bauble, that any other young lady, under the same circumstances, would accept without hesitation."

"But I am not 'any other young lady,'" replied Britannia, rising, and drawing up her slight, elastic figure.

"I *said* that you were arrogant, and so you are."

"You misapprehend me, sir. I humbly thank you for all and sundry your benevolent wishes and intentions towards me," said Brighty.

"Miss O'Riley," questioned General Stuart-Gordon, after a pause, "what disposition shall I make of this casket?"

"Your own discretion will direct you aright, General Stuart-Gordon. It would be great presumption in me to suggest their proper destination."

"The boudoir of the future Mrs. Stuart Gordon—"

"Would be a very fitting disposal of them."

"I perfectly agree with you. And I lay them at the feet of the future Mrs. Stuart-Gordon, if Miss O'Riley will honor the ancient name by accepting it, with the devotion of its oldest representative," exclaimed the General, suiting the action to the word, by gallantly dropping upon one knee, and depositing the casket at the feet of Britannia.

(Don't laugh, or rather *do* if you like; but this *was* something like the style of wooing in our grandmother's days—the days of hoops and high-heeled shoes—of damask and brocades—of high head-dresses—stately, minuet walks—elaborate double courtesies, first to the right and then to the left—of gallant toasts, and of set speeches—when Lord Chesterfield's letters, Sir Charles Grandison, &c., formed the light literature of the day. Yes! this was the style of courtship in favor with gentlemen of the old school, especially where the gentlemen were old themselves, and somewhat stiff and proud. Many a reported courtship of the olden time have I heard from the lips of my grandmother and grand-aunts. It may be that these stately airs were assumed only by the descendants of the cavalier settlers, the citizens of aristocratic Maryland and Virginia. It may be that the republican children of the Puritans never affected such.)

But while I have been talking with you, Britannia has been standing there with her eyes cast upon the ground, with her hand clasped in that of General Stuart-Gordon, receiving his declaration.

At its close, she gravely withdrew her hand, and, saying calmly, "General Stuart-Gordon amuses himself at my expense," courtesied, and was passing from the room, when he stepped quickly after her, and, taking her hand, said—

"Miss O'Riley, I admire you! I would say, Britannia, I love thee, but that your lip might curl to hear such a declaration from a man of my years. But, Britannia, I do very earnestly respect you, very highly esteem you—my happiness is dependent upon your society. I wish to make you my wife, the mistress of my house, the companion of my domestic life, the partner of my social and solitary hours. Britannia, do you think that a woman could be happy as the wife of a man many years her senior?"

There was a deep-toned sadness in his voice as he asked the question, that appealed to Brighty's sympathies. She answered him, *gently*—

"*Oh! yes! I think so*—when all *other circumstances are in harmony*—"

"Could you be happy thus situated, Britannia?"

"I could."

"Then I am to understand that you entertain my suit, Brighty?"

Again Britannia gravely withdrew her hand, and replied, earnestly—

"General Stuart-Gordon, I feel very highly honored, and very deeply grateful for your preference. But permit me to hope for your happiness in a union with some *other* lady more worthy the distinction of your high alliance."

"'Some *other* lady?' Alas! Britannia, thirty years ago such a transfer might have been possible—such a transfer *was* possible—was *made!* But when men of my age form an attachment, it is their *last*, their *last*. There is no more hope in life! It is the very latest autumn flowering of the heart. There is no more blooming in the winter!"

"Permit me to retire, General," said Britannia, respectfully.

"Go, Britannia," said he, sadly. And she courtesied and left the parlor. "Go, Brighty," murmured the sexagenarian lover, more maudlin, sentimental, desolate, heart-broken, than a boy of eighteen in his first love troubles. "Go, Brighty—

"'Go, thou vision! brightly gleaming,
Softly on my soul that fell—
Go! for me no longer beaming—
Hope and beauty, fare thee well.'"

As his biographer, I am ashamed of General Henry Cartwright Stuart-Gordon, U. S. A., just at this crisis! I am mortified that he should thus abandon his dignity, even when solitary in the parlor of the —— Hotel. And I think it was well that, before he grew any worse or got any farther, the shrill blast of the matter-of-fact and peremptory stage-horn broke in upon his music and his poetry, his passion and his foolery, and called him from his ramble in the meandering paths of fancy, to the rough turnpike journey of real life.

In half an hour, the travellers were once more on the road, and in three more days they had reached Mont Crystal in safety.

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CHAPTER XIX.

THE BRIDAL.

Bring flowers, fresh flowers, for the bride to wear!
They are born to blush in her shining hair,
She is leaving the home of her childhood's mirth,
She hath bid farewell to her father's hearth,
Her place is now by another's side—
Bring flowers for the brow of the fair young bride.
Hemans.

But there were no flowers in bloom on the wedding-day of our bride. The pale brow of Louise was indeed crowned with white roses, but they were lifeless, scentless, artificial—lifeless as the chilled heart of the bride—false as the courtesy of her mother—artificial as the forced smile with which Susan Somerville accepted her post of bridesmaid to the youngest, fairest, and wealthiest bride that had appeared in the country for the last quarter of a century—or since the marriage of Margaret Stuart-Gordon, the sole heiress of the Island Estate, the almost fabulous splendor of whose bridal is still a tradition of glory in the neighborhood, and which it was Mrs. Armstrong's ambition to supersede and eclipse with superior magnificence. Having but one daughter to marry off—one who was about to be wedded to the most wealthy man in the State—and having ample means, Mrs. Armstrong felt the propriety of sparing no expense; and she spared none. Every thing that ingenuity could invent, taste devise, luxury desire, or money purchase, was procured—every thing but "fresh flowers for the bride to wear." There were no flowers alive on the day of Louise Armstrong's marriage. The roses had been dead for months—the rose-bushes, stripped of their leaves, stuck up, stiff and stark, as skeletons from the ground. Even the lilies and the tulips were long ago in their graves.

And what a day it *was!* that 22d of February, 18—!

"The Devil is doing all he can to dramatize the four elements!" swore Brutus Lion, who at four o'clock in the morning had jumped out of bed, with a bound that shook the house—yes, and the rocks on which the house was founded, too—and had dashed open the window blinds with a blow of his fist, to look out upon the weather.

"What is the matter," shouted his sister from the next room.

"Matter! matter!" growled Brutus; "no hunting *again to-day, Ger? What will we do with ourselves, you and I!*"

"Start a stag! *I* don't mind the weather! Ha! ha! you are growing effeminate, Brutus!" and Gertrude, with a shout of laughter, broke into the room while Brutus was drawing on his coat. "I should like to see the weather that would keep *me* in doors. *I shall hunt!*" said the giantess, shaking loose her cataract of rolling yellow hair.

"Hunt *what*, on such a devil of a day! Satan would not hunt a *soul* to-day!"

"*I shall*, nevertheless. Let the weather do its *worst*. Lord! Brutus, I defy the elements! Let them rage! I *glory* in defying them! I glory in the sublime *strength* that enables me to defy them! See here, Brutus!"

And going to the window, she threw it up, and, baring her neck and bosom to the sharp and driving sleet, stood there, while her large, fierce, light-blue Saxon eyes danced with a jubilant exultation.

"Oh, shut it down! come away!" impatiently exclaimed Brutus.

Gertrude laughed, and folding her blue cloth pelisse over her bosom, still full of sleet, exclaimed—

"And now you expect me to get a wheezing, don't you! Pooh! as soon expect the wild reindeer of the Arctic regions to catch a cold! No! It is only your *domestic* animals—brute and human—that take cold from exposure to the elements! Oh! Brutus, how you and I have divided the inheritance of our fathers. You, with the strongly-marked North American Indian features and complexion, have inherited the habits of an English fox-hunting squire. I, with the form, features, and complexion of the Anglo-Saxons and the Danes, have all the great hardihood of untamed Indian nature! Nothing affects me but *confinement*. Oh! Brutus, I never was sick! I never *shall* be sick! I defy all the influences of earth to make me sick! I could sleep all night in the open air in such weather as this, and never freeze nor get sick! Oh! Brutus, I can scarcely believe that I can *die!*—that this firm, white flesh of mine shall *ever* perish! Yet I know that some time after I have passed my hundredth year that this body will begin to wear out, and dry away, and fall off from me, and then I suppose I shall ride a winged steed and hunt through the regions of air. I wonder if there is any hunting in the other world, Brutus? I swear to you, Brutus, that heaven would not be heaven to me without it! The 'happy hunting grounds' of our Indian fathers! That is my idea of heaven!"

And in truth it must be confessed that the

Gerfalcon's prospect for any other seemed very small.

"SHUT DOWN THAT WINDOW! will you?" roared Brutus again. "Don't let the room be filling with sleet and snow while you talk! God help you! I mean the man that gets *you* for a wife!—only it is to be hoped that no man will be donkey enough to try!"

"Ha, ha, ha! I am pretty independent of your lordships!" laughed the cold and savage beauty; "*very* independent!"

"And very detestable for *being* so independent! What should make *you* so independent?"

"That is a jibe! but I will answer you. *This* should make me independent—or healthful, cheerful, and free, which is the same thing—I live by the laws of nature."

"Of *savage* nature!"

"Of *nature!* Clothes were made to cover, not to fetter people, and I wear mine lightly and easily. Houses were made to shelter, not to suffocate people, and I stay in ours only to eat and sleep in tempestuous weather; in a word, only when I cannot enjoy my life *more* out doors. Food was made to nourish and sustain, not to enervate and disease people. Therefore, I live upon apples, nuts, turnips, and dried fruits—all those fresh, sweet products of the earth, that, having in them the elements of life and health, will keep almost for ever—and not upon *cooked* victuals, that, having the principles of decay within themselves, spoil in a day or two, or upon your more horrid and disgusting *animal* food. A food—pah!—which, as soon as life is gone, falls into a rapid dissolution. I live upon fresh *living* roots and fruits, and receive their life into my veins. Ah! believe me, I shall live a hundred years, in spite of the necessarily defective physical organization inherited from meat-eating ancestors. And believe me, that the reason why the antediluvians lived so long was, that they lived upon the *living* vegetable productions of the earth—not upon the *dead*, and disguised *cooked* food, and the horrid animal food. And believe me, that the Biblical account of the original sin, and the heathen fable of Prometheus' theft, referred to the same epoch in the world's history, namely, the time when the curiosity or the luxury of man tried animal food, and fire, the fierce element, was captured and debased to culinary purposes, just to disguise the cannibal meal of meat, and then to change, cook, and *kill the living fruits that* were to have been *the healthful and life-giving* food of men. And *what have been the results?* The human race has become luxurious, sensual, debased, and, even amidst the advance of civilization, has declined in size, in health, in strength, and in length of life! Instead of living nine hundred years, men do not live ninety. Water was made to drink, and to bathe in, and not to steep tea and coffee in, or to dilute wine and brandy with; and I bathe in water like a duck, and *drink* water, which is *alive* as the fruits are, and not your tea, and your coffee, and your wine, and your brandy, which, with all their *spirit*, have no *life* or *life-giving* power. And that is the reason why I have glorious health, strength, and spirits; that is the reason why I can defy the storm, when I wish to do it; that is the reason why I shall never be ill—never decay, till I am past an hundred years old—never die till then, unless somebody sends a bullet through my head and heart."

"You may break your own neck!" exclaimed Brutus, in a tone as if he wished she might do so.

"Break my neck—impossible! There is not a horse in the wide world could throw me, and not a fall on earth from which I have not the agility to recover myself. I could ride a lion! I wish some enterprising man would bring one here, and dare me to do it! You are not a *lord* of creation, Brutus, nor do I know one man who is—a luxurious and enervated pack! But I am a *lady* of creation, and I tell you I could ride a lion!"

"Should like to see you try—wonder how you would accomplish it?"

By STRENGTH, Brutus. God bless you, Brutus, look at me! I am STRONG! I could subdue, bind, and lay at your feet, the strongest beef-fed man in the State!—any man but yourself, Brutus—by mere muscular force!"

"Yes, by 'mere muscular force'—you will never 'subdue' a man by the force of your beauty, Gertrude, although you are beautiful, or 'bind' a man by the fetters of love, Gertrude, for you are not lovely."

"As your Zoe!"

"As my Zoe! Now why, Gertrude, do you disapprove of Zoe?—why do you hate Zoe?"

"I don't hate Zoe; neither do I hate humble-bees, but I do not particularly affect either; and I will not have a little coffee-brewing, cake-baking fool in the house."

"You despise her for her birth!"

"I do *not* despise her for her birth, although I know, as you do not know, that she is a mulatto!"

"A mulatto!" echoed Brutus, in dismay.

"Yes, a mulatto!"

"For God's sake! how do you know? Do you know any thing of her origin?"

"Do be quiet, Brutus, and let go my shoulder. *Yes*, a mulatto! *No*, I know nothing of her origin that personal observation does not teach me."

"Nothing else?"

"*No*, I say!"

"Then I am easy. I really thought that you had a warrant for what you said."

"What warrant did I want more than my own eyes? Zoe is of mixed African blood, I tell you. Look at the dead white skin—"

"Susan Somerville's is the same."

"Susan Somerville's is *pure* white—*clear* white. Zoe's is *opaque* white. Look at the darkness around her finger nails; look at her rippling black hair—not brownish black, like the English or American hair, or bluish black, like West of Ireland hair, or purplish black, like Italian hair, but *jetty* black like African hair, and with the little, undulating, wavy curl all through it."

"Pooh! Nonsense! The devil! It is not true. You know nothing about it!" exclaimed Brutus, very pale, and very much troubled.

"It is so, I tell you!" said Gertrude. "And I tell you that that circumstance does not trouble me a great deal, and that I shall go by for Zoe this evening, and wrap the little one up in a cloak and take her in my sleigh to Miss Armstrong's wedding. Ha, ha, ha! Little does Mrs. Armstrong guess that in Zoe Dove she will have a mulatto guest!"

"Gertrude! what do you mean?"

"Little does Mrs. Armstrong suspect that her daughter's second bridesmaid is a mulatto—a *slave!*"

"Heavens! Gertrude!"

But, reader, we are on our way. This is the wedding-day of Louise and Louis, and, tempestuous as it is, we must visit other houses before the breakfast hour.

The family at The Isle of Rays was up at the first dawn—or, rather, at the earliest hour, for day could scarcely be said to dawn on that 22d of February. Apollo Belvidere, fit herald of the bridal morn, rapped at his young master's door at four o'clock.

"How is the weather, Apollo?—it was clouding up last night before I went to bed; how is it this morning?" inquired Louis Stuart-Gordon, jumping out of bed; and opening the door, Apollo entered, set down the wax taper and hot water, and, lifting up both his hands, exclaimed—

"Bress the Lor, massa, de wedder *do* seem to be *a tryin' of itself.*"

At The Crags, George and Hannah had arisen at an early hour. Anna had left her humble cot in a small room within that of Susan Somerville, and, passing to the bedside of the latter, had whispered softly—

"It is time to rise, Miss Susan, if you are going to Mont Crystal to-day; but the weather is dreadful; a furious wind, with a driving sleet of snow and hail, and the roads impassable; the very landmarks lost in the drifted and still drifting snow."

"I will go," *said* Susan, leaving her couch.

"Yes, I will go," *thought* Susan, as she performed her simple toilet. "The fierceness of the storm!—I shall like it, methinks. Certainly, I shall not *feel* it! Yes, I will go. If I do not, Louis may suspect the extent of my credulity and folly, and his kind heart will be pained. I will go."

She went, but who could compute the trials of that young heart, when, to save her friend from the mere possibility of uneasiness, she declined to avail herself of the chance of escape, and resolutely determined to be present at the marriage of Louis, the funeral of her own hopes.

It was on the stroke of five o'clock in the morning when Kate Jumper entered her mistress's stately bed-chamber, and, drawing aside the curtains, said—

"Oh, madam, what a day!"

"Is it raining, then, Kate?" inquired the lady, who, through the closed blinds, and closely curtained windows, and heavily draped alcove in which stood her bed, could not hear the tempest.

"It has been storming, madam; it has been storming all night; sleet and snow driven by a high wind; the ground is covered; you cannot see the tops of the fences, and the tempest is still raging fiercely; the roads, I am sure, must be impassable," said the mulatto, (who, from constant association with the family, spoke better English than most of her race,) and she laid the velvet slippers of her mistress ready for her to rise.

Mrs. Armstrong, rising, drew on her wadded dressing-gown, and going to the window, and drawing aside the curtains, and throwing open the shutters, looked out with dismay.

Roused from her light slumbers by the sudden blast of the storm against the windows, Louise started from her couch, and, nervous and superstitious as she was, shook with terror at such an awakening on her bridal morn! She slipped from her bed, and went and stood by her mother's side. With something like tenderness for the child that had just passed the last night she ever would pass in her mother's chamber, Mrs. Armstrong put her arm around her daughter's waist, and, divining her thoughts, said—

"It may clear away before evening, Louise; nay, it must clear away before noon; it has been storming all night, and a storm seldom lasts so long."

"'Blessed is the bride that the sun shines on;' is not that the proverb, mother?"

"Proverbs are vulgar, Miss Armstrong," replied the haughty woman, who for five minutes would not give way to tenderness.

"I wish the sun would shine out to-day," murmured Louise.

"The sun of fortune shines upon your marriage, Miss Armstrong; and Mrs. Stuart-Gordon will to-morrow be independent of any other light. It will be her mother's halls that will be left in gloom," coldly and bitterly concluded the lady.

"Mother—mother!" exclaimed Louise, throwing herself, for the first time, sobbing, into her mother's arms. "Mother—mother—I will stay with you, if you wish it! Do with me as you please! for am I not your own child? Do I not owe you life? Mother—mother—you are my creator almost; take me to your bosom, and nourish me with your love, as you once did in my infancy, mother, and I will never, never leave you."

"And Louis, then?" inquired the lady, in cold tones, but with secret satisfaction, though she would not have stopped the marriage now for the world.

"Louis! oh, yes, *poor Louis!*" murmured Louise, in a voice of distress.

"You are ridiculous, Miss Armstrong," said her mother, coldly turning away.

The sun did not shine out that day. At noon, the tempest subsided, and there seemed some prospect of a clear afternoon. It was in the lull of the storm that Susan Somerville, attended by Anna, arrived in a sleigh, driven by George. Mrs. Armstrong received her with much politeness, and conducted her at once into the apartment of the bride. Mrs. Armstrong augured well from this arrival, for the success of her fête.

"*If Miss Somerville* could pass the frightful *road leading from The Crags*, others can come," she thought. And soon, indeed, was seen another sleigh, containing little Zoe, carefully wrapped in blankets, and driven by Gertrude Lion. Coming up with a sudden jerk, Gertrude flung the reins upon the horse's neck, springing out knee-deep in the snow, caught Zoe up in her arms, and bearing her on through the drifts, carried her in the hall, and set her down, laughing uproariously. Mrs. Armstrong, drawn from the saloon by the noise, came out to meet them.

"There, Mrs. Armstrong, I have brought you your second bridesmaid. You would not have got her but for me."

"Thank you."

"Oh, by no means; I had a particular wish that you should not miss your *second* bridesmaid!"

"If we had been so unfortunate as to have missed the assistance of this young lady, another could have been found among the guests."

"But," said Gertrude, fixing her blazing light eyes upon the face of the lady, "*I had a particular wish that Zoe should attend her—*"

She paused—paused in astonishment. The haughty woman standing before her had changed as if suddenly struck with palsy. Her form was braced back against the wall and shuddering; her stony brow blanched and corrugated; her cold, sleet eyes riveted on the radiant face of Gertrude.

"Well?" she exclaimed hastily; "go on; why do you stop?"

"Well, I had a particular wish that Zoe should attend her—*friend*," said Gertrude, in a calm voice, with a careless look.

"But, Mrs. Armstrong, you are not well; you have been agitated," said she, with an affectation of interest.

"I have been agitated and over-fatigued," replied the lady; "and really, Miss Lion, your manners are somewhat boisterous and startling, in a quiet house; you are so emphatic on trifles that—but pardon me, I keep you in the draught." Then touching a bell, which was immediately answered by Kate Jumper, she said—

"Kate, show Miss Zoe Dove into the dressing-room of your young lady, and then attend Miss Lion to the apartment prepared for her." And with a stately bow, Mrs. Armstrong swept on from the hall.

An hour or two later, other sleighs with guests began to arrive. The bridal toilet of Louise Armstrong was commencing in the gorgeous dressing-room prepared for her use. Although her two bridesmaids were in attendance, it was the artistic taste of Britannia O'Riley that arranged her dress. The bride sat before a large cheval-mirror. She wore a robe of Mechlin lace, with a deep, rich border of embroidered rosebuds entwined with orange flowers, and worn over a white satin underdress. Her pale, blond hair was braided over her ears, to suit the gentle madonna style of her countenance. Near her, on the back of a chair, was thrown a large and splendid Mechlin veil, of a similar pattern to that of the dress. On the toilet-table were various gloves, fans, essences, extracts, &c., and a case of diamonds, the bridal offering of General Stuart-Gordon, and a casket of pearls, the gift of her mother.

Britannia stood behind the bride, smoothing with her hand the bands of her fair hair, until they shone again. Zoe lifted the casket of diamonds, and taking from it a bandeau, held it towards Miss Armstrong. Louise reached her hand for it.

"No, no, my love," said Britannia, returning the jewels, "no gems for you; not one, Louise; they are too cold and glittering, and too hard and sharp to the touch. They suit *me*, Louise, not you: *me*, Louise, who am unloving and unloved; who, upon occasions, can be hard, cold, brilliant, and sharp—ay, and regal—like them; *me*, who flash out anger with the sparks of my rubies, and scorn with the gleam of my emeralds. But you, Louise, loving and loved—fair, soft, and gentle—you must present no hard surfaces, no sharp points; no—*flowers* for you, Louise."

Zoe, attentive, alert, opened a band-box, and took out a white wreath.

"No, no, it will not do," smiled Brighty, "fresh blooming flowers we want. I will go and gather a wreath from the conservatory. But what are you doing there, Zoe?"

"I am scenting her handkerchief."

"Oh, throw the vial in the fire! I detest those odious and sickening French extracts. The aroma from her rosebuds and orange blossoms, the fresh living breath of the flowers will be best." And Brighty, leaving the bride, went down stairs to select the wreath and bouquet.

On opening the glass doors leading from the saloon into the conservatory, Brighty started violently, and repressed an exclamation of dismay and horror at the sight of blasted desolation that met her eyes. That fine conservatory of the most beautiful and fragrant flowers of our own clime, and of the rarest tropical exotics; that splendid conservatory, that was the wonder and the envy of the whole county; that cherished conservatory, that for years and years had received the most careful attention; had, in the bustle and hurry attendant upon the wedding, been forgotten and neglected, the fire in the furnace had been suffered to go out, and the night had fallen intensely cold; and now, upon the bridal morning the flowers were found dead; all withered by the blighting cold!

"What an ominous day!" exclaimed Brighty, as she turned from that scene of blasted life, and thoughtfully and slowly returned to the bride.

"I do not like her toilet at all," said Brighty, "her beautiful robe and veil are both perfect, but her brow crowned with artificial roses, and her handkerchief saturated with a venomous French extract. No, I do not like it."

"Now you are quite ready," said Zoe, "and oh, so beautiful and sweet, Louise! Now, Susan, we will put on our white muslins, for Louis will be here presently."

Susan Somerville, who had taken no part in this toilet, because her assistance was unnecessary, now arose, and, laying off her dark riding-habit, was preparing to change her dress, when, seeing Louise looking very pensive, she went up to her and said, in a low voice, not to be heard by any of the others—

"You are very serious, Louise; can I do any thing for you?"

"Oh, yes, Susan, I want to see my dear mother once more, *here*, before Louis comes."

"I will go and bring her," said Susan, leaving the room.

Soon Miss Somerville returned, and, stooping down, whispered—

"Your mother is particularly engaged, and cannot come, Louise!"

The bride burst into tears!

"Ah, well!—yes, here is a pretty catastrophe! You must break your heart because 'mother' cannot leave the reception of her guests, to make a scene with you!" exclaimed Brighty, with well-feigned petulance.

"Oh, it is not *that*, Brighty; you know it is not *that!*"

"Well, then, because she *will* not—because she is selfish, cold, and hard, and—"

Here the gentle hand of Zoe fell softly on the arm of Brighty, and the gentle eyes of Zoe were raised reprovingly and imploringly to her face.

"Yes, I was wrong, Zoe, my little mentor. But, Zoe, thank God that, like me, you are alone in the world, and so, are sure that your spirit will never be wounded, your heart never bruised; for none but those we love have power to break the spirit or crush the heart, Zoe."

"Mr. Stuart-Gordon, with his attendants, await your leisure, Miss Armstrong," coldly announced Mrs. Armstrong, as she swung open the chamber-door, and stood among them.

"Let them enter," said the bride, in a low voice, repelled and chilled by the coldness of her mother.

Britannia, lifting the elegant veil from the chair, throwing it over the head and form of Louise, gracefully arranged it, and soon the little party were marshalled down stairs, and into the saloon.

Owing to the frightful tempestuousness of the weather, the vast saloon was very sparsely sprinkled with company.

"What a beautiful couple!" "What a well-matched pair!" "So youthful!" "So interesting!" "How handsome is Louis!" "How pretty is Louise!" "What an elegant bridegroom!" "What a lovely bride!" were the whispered words of admiration that greeted their *entrée*.

As the bridal group took its station in the middle of the floor, the company arose and gathered around. The service commenced—it went on—amid the howling of the storm that drowned the responses—it was over. The white hands of Susan Somerville reverently raised the gorgeous veil from the head of the bride, and carried it away—and no one noticed how pale and ill was Miss Somerville, while friends and neighbors crowded around to congratulate "Mrs. Stuart-Gordon."

"What a grand name for such a little body!" whispered Zoe, laughingly, to Britannia.

"Yes: and what a fierce name Lion would be for such a gentle little love as you, Zoe!"

Zoe crimsoned, and slunk away behind the ample folds of Mrs. Armstrong's purple velvet gown.

General Stuart-Gordon advanced at this moment to offer his congratulations to his son and daughter-in-law, and met the bright face of Miss O'Riley, while the smile and glance of mirth still lingered there. With a deep bow to Brighty, he addressed himself to the fair bride.

The newly-married pair now took their seats with their attendants.

It was now that Brutus Lion and his sister Gertrude—I beg their pardon, Mr. and Miss Lion of The Lair—advanced to pay their compliments. Brutus, in his new suit of Lincoln-green with gilt-buttons, his elf locks cut, brushed, and pomatumed, and Gertrude, looking like the Queen of the Amazons, with her mazarine blue satin and her rolling yellow hair—or yellow mane, as Brutus, the brute! called it—with her rolling yellow hair gathered into a huge knot, and pierced and held by a long jewelled arrow.

"Mr. and Mrs. Stuart-Gordon, I salute your highnesses! You sit there as calmly as though something astounding had not just happened to you! I especially refer to Mrs. Stuart-Gordon. This little creature," and here the golden-haired Amazon took the delicate and white-gloved hand of Louise in her own, "this little one, was this morning 'Louise'—a little girl to be snubbed by her waiting-maid, scolded by her governess, and lectured by mamma; this evening she is 'Mrs. Stuart-Gordon!' Stupendous! Louise, can you bear it? I declare to you, Louise, that there is not a young lady present who could not support your honors with a more imposing dignity than you do! Myself for instance! I am tall and strong, and could sustain the burden of a great name! And Brighty there! I assert that Brighty seemed born to be the mistress of The Isle of Rays! Why, even Susan Somerville would look Mrs. Stuart-Gordon better than you do, little one! though Susan Somerville will make a Virginian matron of the first class, and of the most approved stamp! Where is Susan? Yes! where is she? I have not seen her since she raised the veil from your head, Louise!"

"Yes! where is Susan, love?" whispered Louis to Louise.

"I do not know; I will send and see. Miss Dove, will you seek Miss Somerville?"

Zoe sprang to obey, but Britannia, by a sudden thought, caught her arm, arresting her flight, and saying—

"Stop—Miss Somerville carried off your veil, madam, and will soon return, without doubt."

In the mean while, where was Susan Somerville? All through the day, all through the toilet of Louise, she had sustained herself by an almost superhuman exertion of will. She had thought herself prepared by steady and firm anticipation for the meeting with Louis; but at the first sight of his face, the first sound of his voice, her courage had forsaken her. All through the ceremony she stood, her brain reeling, her heart sinking, her limbs failing under her; yet she stood seemingly very quiet, so calm and white was the habitual style of her face. I said that the marriage of Louis was the funeral of her happiness. Each word of the ritual that severed her for ever from Louis fell upon her ears like the reiterated blows by which a limb might be slowly and painfully cut off—fell upon her heart like clods upon a coffin lid. At the conclusion of the ceremony she felt her senses going—the scene all mingled into chaos and swam before her sight—a confused and painful flashing of lights, and glancing of eyes, and glittering of trinkets—a confused clashing of sounds, where girlish laughter, mingled with deep-toned, heart-felt words of sympathy, and with moaning of the storm without—pressed in upon her brain. To save herself, and with a last effort of self-control, she raised the veil from the brow of the bride, and bore it away. Faltering through the long passages, and up the great staircase, she found her room. A little fire was burning there, and a dim taper was standing on the mantelpiece. Anna was seated by the fire. Unheeding this, she approached the side of the bed, sank down upon her knees, dropped the veil upon the bed, her arms upon the veil, and her head upon her arms, and unconsciously gave way to a succession of low, deep moans, like one in acute bodily pain might do—reproaching herself bitterly the while for the sin and shame of her present sufferings. A rap was heard at the door, but Susan did not heed it. Anna went to the door. It was Mrs. Armstrong—

"Is Miss Somerville in her chamber?"

"Yes, madam; and as soon as she has arranged her dress, she will return to the saloon," Anna hastened to say, in order to prevent questions.

"Let Miss Somerville know that we await her presence to commence the quadrilles," said the lady, and turned and left the passage.

"Miss Somerville," murmured Anna, softly, near the ear of Susan.

The poor girl started, blushed, and, rising in confusion, she crossed the room, and seated herself in the chair by the fire, unconsciously, and without replying.

"Miss Susan, Mrs. Armstrong has sent for you. They expect you in the saloon."

The fire-light, flaring up upon the face of Susan Somerville, showed the features contracted with suffering. She gazed at Anna with confused and half-conscious expression of countenance.

"Shall I assist you to arrange your dress, Miss Somerville?"

"*Oh! Anna, tell them that I am fatigued—ill!*"

"In that case, dear lady, your room would be filled by officious and inquiring people—better try to go down."

"Yes! I had! But, oh, Anna! *if you knew!*"

"My dear and honored mistress, *I do know!* I know all!" said Anna, kneeling at her feet, and taking and pressing and kissing both her hands.

Susan dropped her head upon the bosom of Anna, and wept freely—long and freely. These were the first tears she had shed, and they relieved her of course. Still Anna, kneeling at her feet with the attitude and tones of deepest respect and warmest sympathy, still caressing her hands, spoke, gently, as follows—

"He is not worthy of you, Miss Somerville! Oh, believe it! believe the instincts of affection that assure me when I tell you he is not worthy of you—not wise and strong enough for you. And I would rather see you weep here, than be the wife of one not fitted to retain your esteem, though that man were master of The Isle of Rays. And I, Miss Somerville—I, poor Anna Wood—would rather be the isolated being that I am, cut off by education from one class, and by position from the other—I would rather be myself with my full heart and brain, capable of deeply loving, profoundly thinking, and greatly suffering—than be that poor, little bride down stairs, with her brilliant position and her famished heart and head. Yes, weep! Grief breaks up the soil of the heart, and tears water and fertilize it. You will have a rich heart—for hearts grow rich by suffering; at least so it seems to me. You will have a rich heart—a rich mind perhaps. There is compensation in most things. No tear ever fell, no pang was ever wrung in vain. Those who have spent a life of tears and pains must find consolation somewhere. Oh, believe this, if you pretend to believe in the justice and mercy of God. I, Miss Somerville, with all my cravings after a full life of affections—and you know that people of my race and color live more through their affections than through their intellects—I know that I shall have to pass through life *alone*—alone but for you now, Miss Somerville, and quite alone when you shall be married, as you will be in a few years! Well! I shall pass through life alone. I am not therefore unhappy! I devote myself to somebody's interests, to some worthy object—and I live. Ah! Miss Somerville, I feel that my words only annoy you now; that you would prefer silence to all this talk. No matter, you will think of my words hereafter; and for the *silence* you will have it at last. But now, Miss Somerville, a duty lies before you—a duty that you owe to yourself. You must rouse yourself and go below. For days, weeks, perhaps, you must mingle with this gay wedding party; and then we will go home—to our quiet home at The Crags—where we will have profound peace and old books—the company of our 'brave unfortunates'—the heroes and martyrs of the past, whose example will lend us strength to endure our own trials. Come, Miss Susan! let me arrange your hair."

Miss Somerville, calmed by her fit of weeping—consoled, too, by the delicate attachment of Anna—suffered her hair to be re-dressed and her muslin robe to be re-arranged, and then descended the stairs to the saloon.

Britannia and Zoe, with Gertrude and Brutus Lion, met her at the door.

"You are so pale! Are you ill, Susan?" inquired Zoe, with interest.

This question drew the close attention of the whole group upon Miss Somerville.

"Are you not well?" abruptly inquired Gertrude.

"I perceive that Miss Somerville has taken cold, as I thought she would," remarked Britannia, drawing Susan's arm within her own, and carrying her off.

"My dear Mrs. Stuart-Gordon you will do me a pleasure if you will invite Miss O'Riley to accompany you to The Isle of Rays when we return," said General Stuart-Gordon to his daughter-in-law, as his eyes followed admiringly the elegant form and radiant face of Brighty through the room.

"Oh, thank you! I will do so with great pleasure! I had even wished to ask your permission to do so!" exclaimed Louise, her usually downcast eyes now raised and sparkling.

"*My* permission!" smiled the General, pleased at her happy acquiescence and amused at her girlish humility. "*My* permission! my dear Mrs. Stuart-Gordon!" he said, playfully, emphasizing her new name and title. "Get accustomed to your new dignity as a housekeeper, and invite your own company, and select your own society, without dreaming that I shall interfere!"

At this moment, Brutus Lion, coming forward with a grave bow, solicited the hand of *the bride for the first quadrille*, and led her off *to the head of the set*.

"Take Susan, and bring her to make up this set," whispered the bride.

And in two minutes more Louis stood opposite to them, with Susan Somerville by his side, and her hand clasped within his own.

The music now broke forth in peals of joy, but failed to drown the noise of the tempest, which had revived in all its fury.

The raging of the storm, the terrible state of the roads, and the pitch darkness of the sky, prevented the return home that night of any of the wedding guests.

CHAPTER XX.

THE REVELLERS.

Ring, joyous chords! But who art thou,
With the shadowy locks o'er thy pale young brow,
And the world of dreamy gloom that lies
In the misty depths of thy soft dark eyes?
Thou hast loved, fair girl; thou hast loved too well;
Thou art mourning now o'er a broken spell;
Thou hast poured thy heart's rich treasures forth,
And art unrepaid for their priceless worth.
Mourn on; yet come not here the while,
It is but a pain to see thee smile;
There is not a tone in our song for thee—
Home, with thy sorrows, flee!
Hemans.

Mrs. Armstrong rang her bell at an early hour the next morning. Kate Jumper answered it.

"Let Miss O'Riley know that I shall be pleased to see her alone here, at her earliest convenience," commanded the lady.

Kate Jumper handed her mistress her dressing-gown, and disappeared to obey her orders.

She returned in an instant to say that Miss O'Riley would wait on Mrs. Armstrong in half an hour. And, by the time the stately toilet of the dowager was completed, Britannia rapped for admittance.

Britannia, in an elegant morning-dress of dark-blue satin, with black lace falls—Brighty always made "*une grande toilette*" when she expected to encounter pride and arrogance in others—so Brighty presented herself, making her morning salutation with easy dignity.

"You may retire, Kate. I sent for you, Miss O'Riley, to say, that, after to-day, as your services to Miss Armstrong—or, rather, to Mrs. Stuart-Gordon—will no longer be required, your further stay at Mont Crystal can be dispensed with. I am aware that you are engaged by the year, and that four or five months remain. Will you draw that writing-desk towards me?"

"If you will excuse me, *no*, Mrs. Armstrong."

"No part of your service, eh! Well, truly, I hired you as a governess, not a waiting-maid, and servants of all grades are great sticklers for rank."

"Excuse me again, Mrs. Armstrong, but the desk is in your reach, and out of mine; besides, I fancy you are *stronger* in the *arms* than myself. However"—and Brighty, by a second and better impulse, took hold of the desk, and wheeled it before the lady.

"I was about to say, Miss O'Riley," said the lady, unlocking the desk, and taking from it a roll of bank-notes, "that for these four or five months I am willing to pay you a half-year's salary." And she tendered Britannia the money.

Brighty waved it back:

"No, Mrs. Armstrong, I cannot accept a dollar beyond the amount of my salary up to this day. I shall leave your house to-morrow." And, courtesying, Britannia withdrew from the room.

In truth, the prospects of Britannia were not cheering. She would have died rather than have accepted one dollar beyond her salary up to the date of her dismissal, or have remained another day at Mont Crystal.

Poor Brighty! Extravagant love of dress and jewellery kept her nearly penniless. And when she regained her own apartment, and counted over her slender stock of money, and found only the change of her last half-eagle, she was nearly in despair.

Brighty was no heroine; and you are not to expect any of the heroic virtues to be manifested in her character or conduct; so she walked about the floor, communing with herself, as follows:—

"Well, well, what am I to do? I might have saved three or four hundred dollars if I had been economical, and worn calico dresses and horn combs; or, being extravagant as I have been, I might have still remained here, if I had submitted to Mrs. Armstrong's arrogance. Oh, Brighty, Brighty, see what you have done by being vain, extravagant, and ill-tempered! Economy is so commendable, and meekness is so charming, and I do so thoroughly admire both! Yet the mischief of it is, I can neither fret my senses by coarse clothing, or my temper by other people's arrogance. Oh, Brighty, you were cut out for a princess and *spoiled in the making up!* You are a dislocated queen. Now, where away? I shall never, never find another luxurious home, another really superb patron, (for Mrs. Armstrong *is that*, with all her illness,) or another refined pupil, in the State. Oh! I shall probably find myself governess to half a dozen double-chinned, short-nosed girls and boys, who munch raw turnips in school, and whose mother cuts out her own cloth-clothes, and cowhides her own maids. Oh, Britannia, Britannia, see what you have done for yourself by your regal airs! And then you must refuse General Stuart-Gordon! Was there ever such an egregious fool as Britannia O'Riley?" And Brighty thought gratefully and remorsefully of General Stuart-Gordon.

"He is fond of *me*, at any rate, and after all, is it not as well for a girl like me to be passively loved as actively loving?" said Brighty, smoothing her ringlets and adjusting her dress.

"Brighty!" said the bride the same morning, "there is one great privilege in having a home of one's *own*."

"You have always had such a home, my love."

"In being *mistress* of a home, then?"

"And such a splendid home, Louise!"

"It is that one may share it with their best friends!" exclaimed the bride, throwing herself in Brighty's arms. "Oh, Brighty! come home with me, and be my sister, until you are married yourself."

Brighty slightly started at the last supposition, and looked keenly at Louise. She only saw the hitherto pale girl with her eyes bright as stars and her lips apart and dewy with happiness and hope. Brighty smiled in her eyes and caressed her hair.

"My love, I thank you! But consider! This is a most unreasonable request of yours!"

"*Why, Brighty?*" exclaimed the bride, in astonishment.

"Why, yes, love. *Think of it!* You and Louis would be the most insupportable hosts on earth for the next month or two. *Think of it!* A month with a newly-married bride and groom! I should expire of ennui!" and, laughing, Brighty hurried away to escape her farther importunity.

Then, hastening back with a sudden impulse, she caressed her—

"My sweet Louise, I am grateful for all your love and goodness, indeed I am! But I cannot accept it, Louise! It is not expedient that I should!"

"Oh, Brighty, if you would be persuaded, I should be so happy!"

"You will be happy, Louise! you *are* happy! and I am so glad to witness it. There is Louis! Go meet him!" and Brighty, disengaging herself from the embrace of Louise, hastened away—hastened away from the breakfast-room, where this conversation took place, to the saloon in which most of the guests who had remained all night were assembled.

Here she encountered General Stuart-Gordon, who. taking both her hands, and pressing them, looked with a penetrating gaze in her eyes, and began to say—

"Brighty!—"

"I permit no one but the young girls of my acquaintance to address me so familiarly, General Stuart-Gordon!" said Brighty, trying to withdraw her hands, and to repress the smile that *would* gleam out from under her long eyelashes, and flutter in the corners of her lips.

"*Au revoir*, young lady," said the mature lover, gayly, squeezing both her hands until the jewelled rings upon them dented his fat hands, and, bowing ceremoniously, he let her pass.

General Stuart-Gordon had caught a glimpse of that repressed but gleaming smile, and it was wonderful the effect! wonderful how lightly stepped about that heavy man! how gayly smiled and talked that grave man!—until several matrons in the saloon, wishing to compliment him, said—

"The marriage of your son restores your youth, General Stuart-Gordon!"

A piece of information with which the ungrateful General did not seem to be particularly delighted.

"This popular idea of growing old is an illusion, Mesdames!" he said. "'Age is a movable feast.'"

"A movable fast rather, General," replied the ladies, laughing.

General Stuart-Gordon smiled, bowed, and passed out to seek his daughter-in-law, of whom he was beginning to grow very fond.

Britannia had hurried off to the bevy of girls whom she loved well enough to permit to call her "Brighty."

Gertrude Lion, Zoe Dove, and Susan Somerville, were grouped upon their favorite crimson sofa in the recess of the bow-window at the farther extremity of the saloon. Mrs. Armstrong was doing the honors of her house to a *group of elderly ladies* assembled in the front *of the room.*

At this moment, Louise entered, leaning on the arm of her father-in-law, and looking so beautiful, with her slightly-heightened color, her radiant blue eyes, and her fair complexion, and petite figure, set off to the best advantage by the pale-blue silk of her morning dress.

Mrs. Armstrong, seeing her blithe countenance, grew black in the face, and muttered to herself—

"This it is to have a fickle and ungrateful child! Already she rejoices at the near prospect of leaving her mother's house for the full liberty of her husband's."

Mrs. Armstrong, in her blind pride and jealousy, failed to reflect that she herself had left to others the task of cultivating the affections of her child. And indeed the heart of Louise was expanding as well under the paternal fondness of General Stuart-Gordon, as in the warm and earnest affection of Louis.

"What are *you* going to do, Brighty?" inquired the girls as Britannia took her seat with them.

"I do not know, indeed! I have decided on nothing as yet," said Brighty, growing serious in spite of herself.

Susan Somerville had not joined in the inquiry, but now she looked up with interest upon the sobered face of Brighty, and passing her hand once or twice across her own pale and troubled brow, fell into thought.

"Miss O'Riley, Brutus and myself would be very happy to have you pass some months with us at The Lair. It is true that the housekeeping is rather topsy-turvy, and that the old garden has more rocks, brambles, and snakes in it than flowers, fruits, or birds; but then our horses are the finest in the country, and our dogs equal them," said the Gerfalcon, with a blending of rudeness, arrogance, and courtesy, that was very strange.

Britannia O'Riley bowed courteously, but before she could decline this invitation, Zoe Dove caught her hand, and exclaimed, quite breathlessly—

"No, no! no, no! Come to the Dovecote, Brighty. The housekeeping there is first-rate. You shall have my little chamber; I have just made a nice blue and white quilt for the bed; and I will sleep on a pallet in father's room."

Britannia took her hand and pressed it affectionately, and then said—

"I thank you both very sincerely, dear girls. But, as yet, my future is all undetermined;" and the tears swam in Brighty's eyes, as much from a sense of wounded pride in the thought that her homeless condition had moved the sympathy of these girls, as from an emotion of gratitude for their kindness—and then she thought of General Stuart-Gordon as one who could deliver her from all such mortifications in the present, and protect her from their return in the future; and her heart warmed towards him with the grateful but unimpassioned affection that the young-loved sometimes feel for the aged-loving.

Susan Somerville had remained silent; but as soon as she got an opportunity of speaking to Brighty unobserved, she said—

"Will you come to my room as soon as you can, Miss O'Riley?"

"I will attend you there now, if you please," said Brighty.

And the girls rose and sought the apartment of Miss Somerville.

As soon as they were seated by the quiet, little wood fire, Susan again passing her hand over her brow, like one who tries to dissipate a pertinacious and intensely concentrated idea, said slowly, and in a broken voice—still like one trying unsuccessfully to break the bondage of an over-mastering thought, and give attention to the subject in hand—

"Britannia, after these—these wedding festivities are over, come with me to The Crags. It is wild, blasted—not nice now—but it will be better in the spring!" and, without waiting for an answer, Susan relapsed again into thought, forgetting that she had given the invitation.

Brighty had penetrated her secret. She gazed on that pale and altered brow, those wasted cheeks and hollow eyes—eyes grown twice their natural size through dilation of their pupils, and the emaciation of the face—upon that collapsed and quivering frame, and turned abruptly away to hide the tears that suffused her eyes. Not for the world, by any betrayal of her own sympathy, would she have violated the sanctuary of her friend's sacred delicacy. Recovering her own composure, she returned to Susan, and, by way of arousing her, took her hand, and said cheerfully—

"I thank you, dear Susan; and I accept your kind invitation very gladly."

"It is a dreary waste, a bleak, desolate scene, Brighty, but it has the advantage of healthfulness," observed Susan, in some degree recovering herself.

The dinner-bell rang, and the young ladies separated to arrange their dresses.

I had occasion to tell you once before, that wedding festivities in the country parts of Maryland and Virginia are conducted on quite a different plan to that adopted in fashionable city circles.

The honeymoon, usually passed in solitude by fashionable city bride and groom, is here spent in a round of dinner-parties, balls, &c. It is an occasion of merry-making that quiet country people seize with great avidity and improve to its utmost extent.

Thus our bride and bridegroom were kept in a continual whirl of dissipation for five weeks, which brought April before they were finally settled in their beautiful home of The Isle of Rays.

BOOK II.

CHAPTER I.

> There is a meekness in the upturned eyes,
> A tearful lustre—such as fancy lends
> To the Madonna; and a rapt surprise,
> As if it found strange beauty in the air.
> *Park Benjamin.*

"Now, Susan, when we have breakfasted, I want you to show me all over this house; the shut-up old drawing-rooms, and the dilapidated old bed-chambers; the attics; the cupboards; the cuddies and all."

"Dear Britannia, the house is a ruin."

"I have a romantic love of ruins."

"But, dear Brighty, this is not a ruined castle or manor-house, in the old world, but simply a dilapidated old farm-house in Virginia. What becomes of your romance?"

"Yet, I like it; it is nearly two hundred years old; it was erected in a time full of adventure; it must be rich in legendary lore, early Indian warfare, French warfare, revolutionary heroism. Anna, you take an ardent interest in the heroism and adventures of the past, and the traditionary lore of Virginia is generally, I find, preserved in the old domestics of the family. Anna, your fathers have been in the service of the Somervilles for more than a hundred years; you have heard from your father, who heard from his grandfather, many a story; you can tell us of some heroic young Somerville who distinguished himself in the frontier war with the savages; of some young Captain Somerville, who raised a company to fight against the French; of some young patriot among the Somervilles, who, after achieving miracles of valor, fell riddled with wounds upon the field of victory. You can tell me that, oh! Anna."

"My father does, indeed, remember many anecdotes of the revolutionary war, and is well acquainted with many stories of the early settlement of the State; he delights to recall and *repeat them; it would* give him pleasure to do *so, Miss O'Riley.*"

"Very well, then, Anna; to-night, after we have supped, we will have a blazing hickory fire built in this great old chimney, and we will have a basket of nuts and apples, and George shall come in, and tell us tales of old times, like the retainer of some old feudal family, who delights to relate the heroic exploits of the house."

This conversation took place at the breakfast-table at The Crags, upon the morning after the arrival of Britannia O'Riley with Susan Somerville, and six weeks from the marriage of Louise Armstrong.

As soon as the young ladies arose from breakfast, Brighty, with a wish to arouse Susan from the sad reveries into which she was continually relapsing, again renewed her desire to be shown over the house.

"It is a wreck, Britannia—the other half of the building; a mere skeleton—a shell. It is even dangerous to venture in when the wind is so high as it is now. Beams and rafters sometimes fall—old window-shutters blow down—"

"Happily, no one has ever yet been injured by their fall."

"No—but you will be disappointed, Brighty."

"It will serve me right, then, for obstinacy. Come."

With a slight expression of reluctance, Susan laid aside her knitting, and led the way from the large sitting-room into a wide, bleak hall into which the wind poured, and which it roared, seemingly from ev through the broken plastering and bers. They crossed this, and en apartment, once the saloon of t now much dilapidated and rude

"This was once the saloon; occasions, was brilliantly lighte with distinguished guests. N it is; it serves at once the thre kitchen, workshop, and bedr foster-parents."

Brighty surveyed the old and extensive apartment with interest. It was a mixture of departed grandeur and present poverty. The lofty windows at both extremities of the room had been broken up, and were rudely repaired; the places of some missing panes of glass had been supplied; some by pine shingles, some by tin plates, and some by pasted paper; but all was *clean*. The great arch that, after the manner of most old Virginian mansions, divided the apartment in the middle, had been broken in many places. In the back part of the room was a large arched fireplace, whose marble mantelpiece was covered with rude wooden candlesticks, and hung above with wooden ladles, spoons, bowls, &c., carved by George. On each side of this fireplace were rough shelves, put up by George, and laden with the commonest delf ware and pottery. Harriet was standing at one of these shelves, washing up her breakfast things.

Half way down the middle of the long room, and against the end of the arch, was a rough work-bench, with a pile of flags on one side, and a pile of bottomless chairs on the other. George was sitting there, engaged in putting a new bottom into an old chair.

On the other side of the arch, and at the farthest extremity of the room, was an humble bedstead, curtained with blue check, and a poor old-fashioned chest of drawers, with a sloping lid.

Oh! those memorials of old times, how dear they were to the poor family!

On the other side of this chest of drawers was a large stock of baskets, mats, and children's little chairs, made of flags, by George.

Britannia took all this in by one sweeping glance. She had seen Harriet several times since her arrival, but not George. Now she went up to George, and held out her hand to shake hands with him. Brighty had a thorough respect for honest George. George lifted the old white felt hat he habitually wore, and stood up to speak to the young lady. Miss O'Riley examined and praised the neatness of his work, ordered a work-basket, and then followed Susan Somerville from the room.

"George supports us all by flag-work. Our land, the little of it that is left, is entirely worn out. We can scarcely raise vegetables and grain and fruit enough for our own small family consumption. But George has taken up this trade of flag-work, and contrives to make a living by it."

Then they crossed a short passage, and entered a room, once the large dining-room of the family, now a depository for sacks of corn, barrels of apples, bags of wool, hanks of yarn, &c., and then passed through several ruined apartments, and returning to the wide hall, went up the broad staircase to the second story. After having gone through nearly the whole range of upper rooms, "Now," said Susan, "I will take you into my chamber."

She then conducted Brighty into a large room, in which was a tall tent-bedstead in an arched alcove, and near it a cot-bed. This room had neither carpet nor curtains, but the walls were literally covered with old family portraits, all of them faded, tarnished, and unfit to be seen—that is, all were so, with the exception of *one*, which looked fresh and modern.

"Ah! you are looking at my pictures, Brighty! Well, *they* too are wrecks, but I have not the heart to throw them away. They are unpresentable—therefore I keep them in my chamber!"

Brighty was, in fact, going from one picture to the other, examining them with an artist's interest. She paused before one; it was the fresh and modern looking portrait of which we spoke. It was the portrait of a young, beautiful girl, with a dark, bright complexion, large, soft, dark eyes, and rippling black hair, flowing down in wavelets on her neck and bosom. Brighty gazed on this picture with surprise, with deep interest.

"Here is a portrait, at least, that would grace your sitting-room, Susan!"

"That! yes—but—"

"Well?"

"Nothing," replied Susan, with some embarrassment.

Britannia was suddenly silent, fearing that she had committed she knew not what indiscretion, by asking questions. Susan perceived this, and hastened to say—

"It is the portrait of Genevieve, my father's youngest sister. She died young, and her death was sudden—tragical. My grandfather cannot bear to hear her name mentioned. He has not seen her picture for fifteen years."

"I am sorry, Susan, that I recalled this circumstance to your recollection," said Brighty with interest. "And yet, what a strangely beautiful face! it is a study. I should like to copy it."

"I remember her—nothing like that portrait—I remember her as one recollects a bad dream. She was pale, thin, nervous, and wild looking. She died at sixteen, when I was three years old. Now, Brighty, you are welcome to copy the portrait, but on these conditions—that you do it in this room,—that you never show the copy to any one in the State, and that you never mention her name or allude to her fate after to-day."

"I promise with all my heart."

"This was her room," continued Susan, throwing open a second door. "But who would have thought of such a picture and such a story in this house, Susan?" asked Brighty.

"Every house has its skeleton, Britannia; and I fear no house ever stood fifty years without its tragedy!" and Susan shuddered.

"You are cold, Susan. I have been selfish in dragging you through all these passages and staircases, full of draughts. Come, we will go down." And the girls descended to the sitting-room.

Faithfully determined to persevere in drawing Susan from her abstraction, and forcing her to occupy herself, even when seemingly seeking only her own selfish amusement, Britannia adhered to her plans for their evenings.

As soon as the cloth was removed from the supper-table, Brighty, making herself at home, ordered a liberal supply of the heaviest hickory logs, and herself superintended the piling, upon the great iron fire-dogs. Oh! Brighty was an artist in the smallest matter, and she perfectly subscribed to the Virginian adage, that "a good fire is a handsome piece of furniture." And a wonderful fire soon crackled, blazed, and roared up the chimney. And then the old sofa was drawn up on one side of the fireplace, and two or three chairs on the other side, and the table with the lamp on it wheeled to the middle. And then Brighty, fixing Susan with her knitting on the end of the sofa nearest the table, seated herself by her side, and sent Anna to summon George to bring in his flag-work and his legendary learning. George soon appeared, bringing in his hands a half-finished basket and a bundle of flags, and, drawing a stool to the opposite side of the fireplace from the sofa, sat down and prepared to commence.

And thus the group around the hearth sat:—

On the old sofa on the left sat Susan and Britannia, Anna occupying a low seat by the side of Miss Somerville, with her hand resting affectionately on her lap. On the opposite side old Harriet sat, with a reel by her side, winding yarn; George by her on a low cricket singling out his strip of flags. The table with the lamp dividing the two little groups.

"Well, we are all ready," said Brighty. "Come, begin."

"Hem! hem-m-m!" commenced George, laying away his white felt hat. "Hem-m-m! you see, Miss, when this part of the country was fust settled——"

"Hush!"

"Ma'am?"

"Some one rapped," said Brighty.

"It was the wind," said Anna.

"It was the rats," said Harriet.

"You must expect to hear strange noises about this house, Brighty—not that it is haunted, but that it is old, and filled with rats and mice, and exposed to the winds."

"Go on, George," commanded Brighty.

"Hem-m-m! Well, you see, Miss, when this part of the country was fust settled, the Injins—"

"Rat-tat-tat-tat-ta-r-r-r!"

There was no doubt upon the subject now. The short, sharp, rasping rap of the metal head of a riding whip against the door arrested George's legend, and startled every body; George laid aside his baskets and went to the door.

"Who can it be, this time of night?" asked Brighty.

"We are just about to see," replied Susan.

George opened the door, threw it wide open, and announced—

"General Stuart-Gordon."

All arose to their feet. Britannia crimsoned—with *pleasure*, I fancy. Miss Somerville advanced with quiet courtesy to welcome her visitor—while George, gathering up his flags, and Harriet, taking up her reel, withdrew with Anna from the room.

"Have you supped, General?" inquired Miss Somerville as soon as her guest was seated.

General Stuart-Gordon was about to reply in the affirmative, and to beg that his young hostess would not give herself any trouble—but, impelled by a second thought, he replied—

"I have not, Miss Somerville; and, as I have had a rather long and cold ride, I will feel particularly obliged for a cup of your excellent tea. And, Susan, my dear! prepare it yourself. I have a lively and grateful recollection of the tea you made for us at the Isle."

Smiling faintly at the reminiscence, Susan arose and left the room.

General Stuart-Gordon immediately left his seat, and, crossing before the fire, took that next to Brighty on the sofa, took her hands in both his, and bending forward sought to meet her eyes. At last she raised her eyes and met his glance.

"Well, Britannia!"

"Well, General."

"It is a blustering night."

"Yes, sir."

"More like the middle of March than the middle of April."

"I agree with you, General."

"Britannia, I have had a very cold ride facing the wind up this bleak ascent."

"I regret it, sir."

"Then prevent its frequent recurrence, Brighty."

She was silent.

"How many more such rides shall I have to take, Brighty?"

She did not reply.

"Britannia, I am more desolate than ever. Instead of gaining a daughter by the marriage of Louis, I have lost a son. I once had the company of Louis. Now my son and daughter-in-law, absorbed in their own loves and joys—the egotists!—forget my very existence. They spend long hours in their own apartments, or, coming out, wander hand in hand like two children, all over the Isle. The gardener and his hands are breaking up the soil and trimming the rose-bushes and shrubs and vines of the gardens, and Louis and Louise, hand in hand, as I said, superintend their work. Then they ride out together, read together, play check together, and involuntarily look annoyed if any person innocently wishes to make a third in their diversions?"

"But, General, be reasonable; consider that this poor little bride and bridegroom have been tantalized to death with company for six weeks past, have scarcely had a moment to themselves in which to cultivate each other's acquaintance. Be generous and indulge them," smiled Brighty, who could reply to any thing except the point at issue.

"Very well! Agreed. Let them amuse themselves. I do not complain of that! But, in the mean time, I am not enchanted with the delights of my own solitude."

"You should read a sermon on contentment, General."

"Britannia!" he said, pressing both her hands in both of his own; "Britannia, have I misunderstood your kindness towards me for the last month? If so, Brighty, I will not press upon you a suit that may be very unwelcome—the suit of a man passed middle age; for, above *all things, Brighty, I wish to* secure your happiness. *I had dreamed to* have secured it *with my own.* Let it pass—it was but a dream, Brighty!"

"General Stuart-Gordon."

"I have misunderstood you."

"General Stuart-Gordon, if you have understood me to be coldly disregardful of your friendship, callously ungrateful for your kindness to me, *then* you *have* misunderstood me."

"Britannia! do I comprehend you? Is it possible, then, that you can love—"

"General, I did not talk of love."

"Oh, Britannia!"

"You do not love me."

"Britannia, I assure you—"

"You are, probably, past the age of loving *me.*"

"Miss O'Riley—"

"Or perhaps you *should* be."

"Miss O'Riley, I affirm that this is very cool on your part."

"General Stuart-Gordon, have patience with me; you will be better pleased when I have concluded. It is certain that you do not love me, and I am constitutionally incapable of falling in love with any body; and therefore it is that I can ring the changes on this word without embarrassment."

"Madam!"

"But you are *lonesome*—listless. You expect to live some thirty years in the world yet, and you do not wish to pass that time either in solitude, or, what is quite as bad, with a young couple who are quite too much taken up with each other to attend to you. You want a companion who shall be handsome, cheerful, witty, elegant, and who shall be your *own*, and *happy* in that condition."

"You are a singular girl."

"Very singular in some matters, General!—unique even! But, to return to the subject; do you expect that want of yours to be met?"

"A companion, young, handsome, witty, gay, elegant, and *happy* as the wife of an elderly man? No, Britannia! You have convinced me. It was an unreasonable wish; yet, of that presumption I have been guilty. No, Brighty, that want will never be supplied—that companion never be found."

"Then I suppose you consider me as a poor substitute for such a prodigy?" said Brighty, smiling, and averting her face.

"Britannia! Britannia! you are more than all you have described as my dream—brilliantly beautiful, sparklingly witty, of queenly elegance, and in the first bloom of your youth

—but, Brighty! dear Brighty! you could not be *happy*, (that is the requisite)—you could not be *happy* with me—could not love me!"

"I am not in love with you, General Stuart-Gordon, any more than you are with me; pray do not insist upon my being so. It would be no compliment to you."

"No compliment to me!"

"No, sir! I only love when I *pity* and *protect!* Do you want me to pity and protect you? I love your soft Louise, the gentle little Zoe, the quiet, simple Susan Somerville. I love enough for my happiness. I have a greater want than that. It is to respect, admire, esteem! It is not necessary to my peace that I shall be in love with the gentleman who gives me his name—it is indispensable that I shall be able to honor him—that I shall be proud of him!"

"And I then, Britannia?"

"I *honor* you, General Stuart-Gordon!"

"And I—*love* you, Brighty!—*love* you—but I will not sacrifice you!"

And he drew her to his bosom, and kissed her tenderly, and, rising, walked away.

With his hands clasped behind his back, with his head bowed upon his breast, he slowly and thoughtfully paced up and down the room, heaving great sighs. At last he walked back towards her, took the seat by her side, took both her hands again in both of his, and bent forward, seeking her eyes again. She averted them, while a deep blush overspread her face. Yet she did not withdraw her hands, which he continued to press. He spoke again, in deep serious, and earnest tones—and he said—

"Britannia, I want you to be serious, and listen to me, my dear, for *I* am *very* serious. Two months ago, I admired you, and told you so. I loved you, Britannia, but dared not tell you so—dared not expose my earnest and devoted affection to your girlish scorn; for, Britannia, there is a sad, sorrowful diffidence in the love of the old for the young—and therefore, Britannia, I offered you my hand, without speaking of my heart. I laid my name, rank, and fortune, at your feet, and thought that, by investing you with all my possessions, by surrounding you with every elegance and luxury that wealth could procure, that I might secure your happiness, and, with your society, my *own* happiness—I offered you my hand, and you refused it!"

"I would not marry only for wealth and rank, General."

"I thought that a delicate, elegant, and refined girl, like you, would set a due value upon the splendors and luxuries of life, and yet you refused me."

"I would not marry only for splendor and luxury, General."

"I thought, also, that a sensible girl like you, seeing herself alone and unprotected in the world, would see the expediency of a prudent marriage, and yet you refused me."

"Because I would not marry for *prudence*, alias *policy*, alias *selfishness*, General Stuart-Gordon!"

"You refused me, Britannia, and I did not press my suit—did not press it, because, as I said, there is a diffidence in the unselfish love of age, that youth does not even know. Brighty, had I been younger by twenty years, I should not so readily have resigned you. For Brighty, I loved you, *loved* you. I wished for your constant presence—I wished for your undivided affection; but more than all this, Brighty, I wished for your happiness; and seeing your aversion to marrying an old man, I refrained from persecuting you with my addresses. Now, hear me, Brighty. Within the last month you have seemed to have a softer cadence in your voice, a softer light in your eyes, as you looked at or spoke to me. This gave me new hopes—nay, hear me out, dear Britannia—and I came here this morning, full of foolish confidence, with the design of renewing my offer. Stay, stay, Britannia! and hear me out. I came here to renew my offer; I see the repugnance it excites, and, Brighty, I withdraw. Do not believe, my dear, that I would annoy you. But, Brighty, since I have been sitting here, I have thought of another plan. Brighty, you are alone in the world, without the love of mother or sister, without the protection of father or brother; and with your rare beauty and refined tastes, you are exposed to all the dangers and hardships of a homeless and unsettled life. Brighty, listen to me, my dear. I have no daughter or sister; shall have no wife, since you refuse me; I have no female relative at all—and, Brighty, I want one. Since you cannot be my wife, be my daughter, Brighty. Forget that I ever dreamed of any other relation between us, and be my daughter, Brighty. I will regularly and legally adopt you. You shall come home to the Isle, and live with Louise, who loves you. Will you be my daughter, Brighty?"

"No, General Stuart-Gordon."

"What! not even my daughter, Brighty?"

"No, General Stuart-Gordon—but—"

"Well?"

Britannia turned her blushing face quite away from him, as she held out her hand. He carried it to his lips.

"Well, Brighty?"

"But—"

"Well?"

"I will be your *wife*, if you will take a wayward girl, whose pride and petulance makes her quite unworthy of you."

"My own dear Brighty—my darling, sparkling treasure! You—but how can you love me, Brighty?"

And again, with that eager, anxious, scrutinizing gaze, he sought the eye of Britannia. She turned her head away, saying softly—

"Do not look at me so closely, for I wish to be frank with you, sir, because I owe it to you, and I shall not have courage to say all that is on my heart, if you look at me so."

"There, then, Brighty. Now tell me, *do* you love me, *can* you love me, Brighty? Ah, I am so anxious upon that point, dear Britannia."

Britannia answered in a low, trembling, but persevering voice.

"I know you are anxious, because you are doubtful, sir; therefore, I force myself to speak. Yes, General Stuart-Gordon, I *do* esteem you. Do not think I would accept the high destiny you offer me, without. You are covered with military glory, and I honor you for that. I am proud of you for that. I shall be proud to bear your name—to be your wife. You are the first—the *only* one who has ever opened the shelter of his heart to give me a home there, and I am grateful, deeply grateful for it, sir."

"Yet, Britannia, my dearest child, esteem, honor, pride, gratitude, are not love."

"And I would not marry for these only," said Brighty, in a very low voice.

"Then you *do* love me, Brighty?" said the General, holding her hands, and bending forward to read her countenance.

Now she turned the full light of her radiant face upon him, and looked up clearly, as she replied—

"My only friend and benefactor, at least I have no one *but* you to love."

"Alas, it is necessity, not choice, then Brighty!"

"You have no peer, in my estimation, General Stuart-Gordon."

"Then why did you refuse me, Brighty?"

"From a little pride and petulance, from a little doubt of the reality and permanence of your affection for me."

"Oh, *Britannia!*"

"*Sir, I have faults, very serious* faults; I know them too well. But, alas, self-knowledge does not help me to self-improvement. I am proud, vain, high-spirited, and extravagant; yet, in my heart, I do love humility, meekness, and moderation; yet, with all my faults, I am sincere and grateful; and at least I bring you a true and single heart, sir."

"Your faults! my dearest Brighty! I love you just as you are, my frank, ingenuous Brighty. I love you for just what you are."

Five minutes after this, Susan Somerville entered the room, followed by George, bearing the tea-tray. And General Stuart-Gordon took his tea, and shortly after took his leave, tenderly shaking the hand of Susan, and fervently pressing that of Britannia.

CHAPTER II.

SPRING AT THE ISLE OF RAYS.

Spring with its rose-buds!—Spring,
The gladdest time in the capricious year,
With its green foliage, and its sunlight clear,
And with a drowsy tune
Of the bright leaping waters as they pass
Laughingly on amid the listening grass.
W. H. Burley.

Oh, The Isle of Rays in Spring! It was a scene more enchanting than a poet's dream of Eden—a Mussulman's vision of Paradise. It was an elysium of beauty, music, and fragrance. It was a rapture merely to stand there in the morning's silvery flood, and *breathe*, though every other faculty were suspended.

It was a heaven of beauty. The mansion, with its white freestone walls, and its piazzas above and below, supported by the light and elegant white marble pillars of the Corinthian style of architecture. Its terraces, with its beautiful shade-trees dropping shadows on the fresh and dewy grass; its parterres of flowers, of every form and hue; its lawn, with serpentine walks and meandering streams—with groves of trees and vine-clad arbors—with the black shadows of its rocks, and the bright flashing of its waters, leaping, sparkling, and glancing in the sunshine—radiating streams of dazzling light. "The Isle of Light! The Isle of Sunbeams! The Isle of *Rays!*" would break inspired from the lips of the spectator.

It was a heaven of music, when the full, rich diapason of Nature's morning hymn was sounding there, from the lowest notes—the almost inaudible murmur of a foliage-hidden stream, and the whispered confidences of the breeze wooing the leaves—to the clear, rippling, ringing song of the rivulet, and the shouting laughter of the cataract; and from the harmony of the bee, beguiling the flowers, to the grand harmonic chorus of a thousand birds, breaking out in their rapture, till all the sun-bright air above seemed shattering with silvery sound, and the particles falling around you in a rain of radiant light and music. "The Isle of Harmony! The Isle of Music!" a *blind* one would exclaim, in delight.

And it was an elysium of the breath of millions of flowers. The delicate perfume of the violet, the fine fragrance of the lily, and the rich aroma of the rose, mingled with the intoxicating odors of the rarest exotics, filling with sweetness the sun-lit and music-freighted atmosphere of this Isle of Fragrance!

The Isle of Rays! The Isle of Music! The Isle of Fragrance! The elysium of beauty, melody, and perfume! It was a rapture to stand and receive all this flood of beauty, harmony, and fragrance!

And Louis and Louise wandered through its groves and gardens, like another Adam and Eve, through another Eden. And it delighted Louis to see how Louise revelled in the light of her new liberty. At last the elasticity of youth had thrown off the pressure of long habits of restraint. Her step became so free, so light, so fleet; the tones of her voice so high, clear, and cheerful; her laughter so gay and ringing! And, oh! Louis loved her more and more, for every good his love had brought her! He *had* feared that the long-fettered mind, the long-repressed affections of his little bride, would never escape from their captivity—never throw off their chains. But it was wonderful—delightful—how soon Louise cast off the habit of restraint! How soon she chipped the shell, and fluttered out a jubilant and full-fledged singing-bird! How soon she emerged from the chrysalis, and flew off a joyous, radiant butterfly! And how she loved Louis, as one who had given her freedom, happiness—new life! And how Louis loved *her!* How deeply, how profoundly; how much more deeply, how much more profoundly, as he saw her gladden and brighten in the light of his love! It was now that the depth and strength of his devotion to Louise was revealing to him the greatness of his own soul. He saw her happy in his affection—happy through his means—and he felt in his profoundest heart, that were *the sacrifice of his life—yea,* of his *soul*—*demanded as the price of her* happiness, it would be made. Sometimes he even regretted that every good she enjoyed was so readily at hand, that he was not required to toil for her. There is an intensity of idolatry in some love that cannot be expressed but by *suffering for the beloved.* This may be excess—insanity—fanaticism—or it may be the profoundest religion; but it is truth—truth on earth. *The deepest love cannot be satisfied but by suffering for the welfare of the beloved.*

The love of Louis for his bride was intense—profound—powerful. The love of Louise for her husband was only grateful, glad, and confiding. That was the difference between them.

This was the under-current of feeling on both sides. Superficially they appeared like two children, wandering through the groves, or sitting together in the bowers, of The Isle of Rays. And the countenance of Louis would radiate joy, as his dancing eyes would follow the flying feet of Louise, when she would spring from his side to chase a bird or pluck a flower. That changed Louise! whom he remembered pacing in slow, lady-like steps through the lofty, cold halls of Mont Crystal! The enfranchised spirit of Louise electrified even the grave old General, who would sometimes catch his little daughter-in-law up in his arms and toss her until she laughed aloud!

But for the most part General Stuart-Gordon had the good taste to withdraw himself from the company of these newly-wedded lovers. Sometimes by shutting himself up in his library, sometimes by joining the hunt, of which he was still very fond, and sometimes by riding over his estate, and giving his personal attention to its management. But still more frequently his horse's head would be turned in the direction of The Crags.

Thus happily passed the time at the Island Palace, until Mrs. Armstrong, at the invitation of Louis, came to pass a month with her daughter. The presence of this haughty and frozen woman cast a cloud over the brightness of The Isle of Rays. She radiated a spiritual cold that chilled all who approached her. She had arrived in her coldest, hardest, and haughtiest mood; and all that she saw, heard, and felt there, aroused the most malignant passions of her soul. She saw Louise, instead of being pale and dispirited at her long absence, looking rosy and joyous; and if she did not hate the child for daring to be happy, except by her permission and through her means, at least she loathed her daughter's husband, for superseding her in the work. Yes, she began to hate Louis in proportion as Louise loved him. And sometimes she would look at Louise in astonishment, wondering that she presumed to be so free, so glad, in *her* presence! She grew alarmed for the permanency of her influence over her child's intellect and affections. "In one short month I have lost so much ground. In a year longer I shall be nothing in the sum of Mrs. Stuart-Gordon's life! And she is *my child*—MINE! *I gave* her life! She came into the world by *my* will—*mine!* And who is this Louis Stuart-Gordon? Perdition catch his soul! to come between me and the child I bore!" And deep in the heart of this woman, whose external appearance was so cold, so hard, so stern, whose manners were so guarded, so haughty, so freezing—deep in the heart of this diabolical woman burned and burned a concealed, intense, and growing jealousy, as under the snow-clad surface of Etna glow the most dangerous fires.

"I will not leave my child alone with these people another month," she said; "they shall not win her affections entirely from me. Louise is not the same being; in another five or six weeks, she is lost to me. I will remain with her. Yes, I will remain with her. I will marry this old creature—this old Stuart-Gordon. True, he is some fifteen years older than myself—true, this will be a descent on my part—that it is a grave departure from high self-respect in a woman of my mature age, to marry, under any circumstances; but I must maintain my authority over Louise! I must do it by residing with her; and I can only reside with her as the mistress of this house and estate. I cannot take a subordinate position in the house of my daughter and son-in-law. I must make up my mind to marry this old Stuart-Gordon. The neighborhood, I presume, will have a great deal to say upon the subject, when it is known to be in prospect. Let them say it! If *I* can gain *my own* consent to the step, the opinions of others are unimportant, as they are impertinent. Moreover, these opinions will only be whispered in subdued tones; none will be found daring enough to raise their voices against any act of mine. After all, this will be only an alliance. It will give me almost absolute power over this estate; for, once mistress here, I shall do as I please with the old man, with his son, and I will see if the affairs of this estate will not be better administered by *me*, than they have ever been by this fox-hunting and dinner-giving *bon-vivant*, or this flute-playing, verse-making *sentimentalist!* The government of *two such estates as those of* Mont Crystal and The Isle of Rays—estates that, joined, form half the county, will give me as large a share of power, ay, and more absolute power, than that enjoyed by any petty sovereign in Europe. Come! it is decided! I will form an alliance with this old General." And recognizing no appeal from her own high will, the arrogant woman set about the execution of her purpose. She became very exacting of attentions from General Stuart-Gordon, pressing him with commanding haughtiness into her service upon all occasions. She never arose to cross the room, without saying, with the air of an empress ordering her chamberlain—"General, I will trouble you for the support of your arm." She made him fetch and carry her fan, reticule, and knotting, open and shut doors, hand her water, pick up her handkerchief, and do her errands, and all with the air of conferring a great honor upon his Generalship. The climax was in the evening, when she would command him to open the chess-board, and play a game of chess with her. General Stuart-Gordon, gallant, good-natured, and at leisure, was very much at the command of any lady who would do him the honor of exacting his services. Besides which, he had a very great respect for Mrs. Armstrong, both upon account of her imposing rank, character, and deportment, and by reason of her position as his guest. In addition to his universal gallantry and particular devotion, General Stuart-Gordon had two very important reasons for employing and conciliating Mrs. Armstrong. First, he saw that her surveillance over Louis and Louise impaired their happiness, and he wished to deliver his children, as he called them, from her espionage, by absorbing her attention himself. Secretly, he stood in great awe of Mrs. Armstrong; he felt a presentiment that she would be horrified and outrageous at the news of the projected marriage between himself and Miss O'Riley, and he wished to conciliate her good feeling before he should dare to announce it. And as the marriage was already appointed and approaching, this annunciation was an imperative necessity. Ah! little did he dream of the matrimonial designs of the lady herself upon him! Old gentlemen see nothing improper or unusual in their own connubial intentions, are grievously shocked when they hear of any such projects finding a lodgment in the brain of an elderly lady. This feeling may be natural and right. General Stuart-Gordon, then, never suspected the drift of Mrs. Armstrong's thoughts and purposes. He was charmed that she treated him well, with kindness, with sympathy; and as days passed, and as every day saw them somehow better friends, he did not despair of her consent to his marriage with Miss O'Riley. And this consent was of more importance to the General than any one at first thought would suppose; for General Stuart-Gordon loved family peace and good fellowship above all things—*except Brighty!* Encouraged by Mrs. Armstrong's gracious and condescending manners, he began to feel his way, as it were, towards an explanation.

Finding himself alone with the dowager in the morning, when Louis and Louise would be roaming about the garden, or reading poetry in their room, he would begin to say something pathetic about the solitude of his position, forgetting—the egotist!—that the lady to whom he spoke was just precisely in the same predicament as himself, and therefore extremely likely to misapprehend the drift of his discourse. And so he would say very moving things about his loneliness—very touching things about going down the vale of years *alone*—expecting to move Mrs. Armstrong's pity for his condition, and by and by win her consent to his marriage. And Mrs. Armstrong, totally misunderstanding his purpose and misapplying his words, would receive these confidences with much more indulgence than he could have hoped to obtain. Nay, Mrs. Armstrong would fully agree with General Stuart-Gordon, that it *was* a serious thing to be left alone in the decline of life—that as young people *would* take to themselves partners and leave their parents alone, it behooved the latter to secure companions on the downward journey of life. And it was wonderful upon what good terms they would part after just such confidences as these—each misunderstanding the other very thoroughly! General Stuart-Gordon would step off on tiptoe, as though he trod on air, thinking his paths made straight before him! Mrs. Armstrong would sail out with her stately mien, and assume an extra degree of authority over Louise, Louis, the negroes, the mansion, and the estate—fully believing this authority to be but slightly anticipated.

The decisive hour arrived. General Stuart-Gordon was to be married in a month; and no one, as yet, suspected it. It was now absolutely necessary that the announcement of this approaching marriage should be made.

One morning, immediately after breakfast, Louis and Louise as usual left the house. They were to take the boat and have a little voyage. Mrs. Armstrong sailed majestically into the drawing-room, and seating herself in one of the high-backed chairs near the front windows, took out her knotting and commenced work. The door opened, and General Stuart-Gordon, having screwed his "courage to the sticking-place," stalked superbly down the room, and, drawing a chair opposite to that of the dowager, sank into it, and—and—unluckily forgot the speech—a piece of the most convincing logic and the most subduing eloquence ever composed—that he had prepared to conquer Mrs. Armstrong with. He found nothing to say but that which he had said a hundred times already, namely—

"You perceive that those young people have left us alone again, madam! the egotists—the egotists! They forget every one else—every *thing* else—except themselves, and the presence of nature!"

"Happiness is selfish, sir," replied the laconic lady.

Silence—a deep pause—a great sigh from General Stuart-Gordon, who breaks the spell by saying, pathetically—

"It is a dreadful thing to be alone, madam."

"It is, sir."

"Ah! *dreadful!*"

"Yes, sir."

Silence again—another pause—expectancy on the side of the lady—embarrassment on the part of the gentleman, who again finds courage to speak in moving tones, saying—

"To go down the vale of years alone, Mrs. Armstrong!"

"Certainly, sir."

"Is a deplorable prospect!"

"Undoubtedly, General."

"Ah!"

"I perfectly agree with your view of the case, General."

"To have no gentle female friend to smooth the pillow of—the pillow of—of—"

Silence a third time—the lady out of patience—the gentleman out of courage.

The lady at last comes to his assistance—

"I am surprised, General Stuart-Gordon, that you, who do not like the loneliness of your life, should never think of taking a consort."

"Madam! oh!"

"That you should never think of marrying."

"Mrs. Armstrong, if I presumed, if I thought, if I hoped—"

"Well, sir?"

"If I dared to hope—"

"Well, sir?"

"In short, madam, I have *dared* to hope your approbation to my suit. I—"

A pause.

"I listen, sir."

"In one word, madam, I *have* selected a lady," said General Stuart-Gordon, in an earnest tone of voice, looking intently at the dowager, who kept her eyes fixed upon her knotting.

"I await your further explanation, sir."

"A lady of the finest intellect, of the highest spirit, of the most dignified manner—"

"You are extravagant, I fear, sir."

"A lady in whose praise *no* terms of admiration *could* be thought extravagant."

"You are an enthusiast, General."

"A lady worthy of the *highest* honor."

"Your panegyric is embarrassing, sir."

"A lady who has my whole *heart's* affection—my whole *head's* approval."

A pause.

"I listen to you, sir."

"A lady who will be singularly acceptable to my dear daughter-in-law—one bound to her by the ties of affection—one bound to her by the obligations of gratitude—one whose care and instruction has contributed to make Louise what she is—one with whom it will delight Louise to pass her whole existence—one beloved, idolized by Louise."

"And this lady—"

"*Is one whom Mrs. Armstrong cannot for a moment be at a loss to designate*," said General Stuart-Gordon, in a deep, earnest tone of voice, and looking intently in the face of Mrs. Armstrong.

Mrs. Armstrong arose, with an air of majestic grace, and, standing, placed her hand, within that of General Stuart-Gordon, and said:—

"Sir, I *cannot*, as you have asserted, be at a loss to designate the lady whom you have honored by your preference—and I thank you in the acceptance of your overtures! Do not, however, suppose by that I receive all the extravagant encomiums that you have been so polite as to lavish upon me. I listen to them merely as the stereotyped compliments gentlemen are pleased to pay upon these occasions. I will, however, dispense with them from this time, sir, as we are rather mature to make or receive gallant speeches. Nevertheless, there is a singular propriety in your selection, and a most becoming fitness in our alliance, sir. The house of Blackistone and of Armstrong, like that of *Cartwright and Stuart-Gordon*, is one *of the oldest in the country.* I shall not dishonor the old and haughty name of Stuart-Gordon;" and, bending her head graciously, the lady was sailing majestically from the room, when—

I wish you could have seen the countenance of General Stuart-Gordon, as his face blanched and blanched, his head grew dizzy, his back grew weak, and his knees smote together. Here was a catastrophe! In truth, the sky was falling. He felt the fragments shattering his nerves. With an adjuring gesture of despair and desperation, he advanced towards her—

"*Mrs.* Armstrong."

"Well, sir?" said the lady, turning quietly around.

"My *dear* madam."

"Well, sir?"

"I am *covered* with confusion."

"I do not understand you, sir."

"Madam! my *dear* lady! you have misunderstood me."

"Sir?"

"*Excuse* me! you have mistaken my meaning."

"Sir?"

"*Forgive* me! I never presumed to the distinguished alliance of Mrs. Armstrong."

"*Sir!*"

"*Pardon! pardon!* The lady of my choice does not occupy so high a place in society. The lady of my choice—"

"Is—"

"*Miss Britannia O'Riley!*"

Words would fail to express the dumbfounded astonishment, the astounded dismay, of that haughty woman, struck statue-still, with wonder, where she stood! Yes! at first it was simple stupefied *wonder* that fixed her there, with rigid limbs, pallid cheeks, and darkly corrugated brows. Yes, it was wonder, before it was even rage or vengeance.

"BRITANNIA O'RILEY!"

"Britannia O'Riley."

"A *governess! a domestic!* a hired *servant!*"

"Britannia O'Riley! a beautiful, graceful, elegant, and accomplished woman."

"A *beggar!* a low Irish beggar!"

"A lady! a lady to whom I shall be proud to give my name."

"A poor, miserable Irish *beggar*, whom I hired to serve my daughter!"

"My intended *wife*, Mrs. Stuart-Gordon, *senior*, and mistress of my house within one month from this."

"Are you dreaming—insane—intoxicated?"

"Madam, I should lay myself under the

suspicion of being influenced by one of the three states, if I permitted you for one moment longer to indulge in the intemperate language you have just used."

"General Stuart-Gordon, *I shall leave your house.*"

"Mrs. Armstrong, I trust you will see the absolute, the inevitable necessity of your leaving this house before the arrival of my wife."

"Am I to be insulted—*outraged*—under the roof of my daughter?"

"No, madam! nor are you to insult or outrage the intended wife of her husband's father."

"Enough! I leave this house to-morrow, and *my daughter returns to Mont Crystal with me.*"

"Madam!"

"My daughter came hither a bride—entered this house as its mistress. She should not have entered it upon any other terms—she shall not remain in it in any other capacity. She shall not cede her place, and give precedence to a low-born Irish serving-wench."

"My wife will be mistress of my house without a doubt, madam. And Mrs. Louis will certainly give precedence to Mrs. Stuart-Gordon, as becomes her."

"*Indeed*, sir! You forget that Louis Stuart-Gordon inherits The Isle of Rays in right of his mother, Margaret Stuart-Gordon—not in right of the man who bartered his patronymic for a fortune! That, therefore, Louis Stuart-Gordon is master of the estate and mansion-house, as his wife is mistress of the same."

"I think you have been misinformed upon some of these points, madam, I think you will find yourself seriously mistaken."

"Sir! my daughter and myself have too much self-respect to *strive* for precedence with an Irish waiting-maid, or the dotard whom her cunning has enslaved. My daughter returns with me to Mont Crystal."

"You return *alone*, madam! Mrs. Louis remains where she is."

"We shall see, sir!" exclaimed the lady, purple with rage.

"We *shall* see, madam!" replied the General, bowing ceremoniously, as he held the door open for her to pass through.

CHAPTER III.

A PARLOR STORM.

> Her's was not that blind, capricious rage,
> A word can kindle and a word assuage;
> But the deep workings of a soul unmixed
> With aught of pity where its wrath had fixed.
> *Byron.*

MRS. ARMSTRONG reached her chamber, and by a peal of bells brought Kate Jumper to her presence—

"Have Mr. and Mrs. Stuart-Gordon left the shores of the Island yet?"

"Yes, madam."

"How long since?"

"An hour, madam."

"Do you know what direction they took?"

"Up the river towards the falls, madam."

"It is too late and too far to recall them. You may go!—stay!"

"Madam!"

"Go into Mrs. Stuart-Gordon's room and pack up her wardrobe. We return to Mont Crystal to-night."

"Yes, madam."

"And, *observe*, be *silent* upon this matter."

"Yes, madam."

"When you have completed the packing of Mrs. Stuart-Gordon's wardrobe, return hither to pack up my own. Go!"

And thus dismissing her attendant, the lady seated herself in stern calmness by the window, and took out her knotting.

The tall mulatto stalked on to the apartments of the bride, to execute her mistress's orders.

The suit of apartments appropriated to Louis and Louise consisted of one bed-chamber, between two dressing-rooms, and connected with them. The dressing-room assigned to Louise was fitted up in the most costly and elegant style. It was a front room on the second floor, and its two tall windows overlooked the terrace, lawn, river, the opposite bank, and the bride's own home, Mont Crystal. Between these two high front windows hung a tall cheval-mirror—and the windows and the mirror were curtained and festooned with blue silk and white lace, tied up with ribbons, and wreaths of violets. The carpet on the floor and the paper on the walls were of the same color and pattern—blue violets running over a white ground. The bureaus, wardrobes, dressing-tables, &c., were all of that beautiful white satin-wood that looks so much like ivory.

When Kate Jumper stalked into this room, she found it already occupied by a little, old, short, thick-set negress, who was not employ ing herself by setting the room in order, but amusing herself by trying on one of her young mistress's exquisite little French hats, and viewing with much self-satisfaction the effect of the soft white velvet and delicate white plumes surrounding a face black, shining, seamed, and wrinkled as a dried prune.

This was Seraphina, the wife of Apollo, and the nurse and waiting-maid of all the Mistresses and the Misses Stuart-Gordon for the last fifty years—now the personal attendant of Louise.

"Good morning, Mrs. Jumper," said the seraph, laying off the white hat and feathers indifferently.

Kate Jumper disdained to answer, except by a short nod, and, striding up past the Abigail, she took the bunch of keys from the dressing-table, and began to unlock the bureaus—

"What are you going to do, Mrs. Jumper?"

The mulatto did not think it worth while to reply.

"I say there! I say there! don't tech them Brissles laces and ribbons! I never 'low any body to tech 'um but myself. I say! why don't you *hear* me? why don't you *stop?* Are you crazy? Stop o' rummidgin' my missis's thingumies—will you? Here, give me the keys! I never seen sich impidence in all my life! You must be cracked! Here! gim me them keys!" and, running and waddling towards her, the little woman possessed herself of the disputed keys with a sudden jerk.

Kate Jumper, without speaking, quietly held out her hand to get them again. Seraph hugged them under her fat chin with both hands. With a silent but peremptory gesture, the mulatto started to her feet, and demanded their return.

"I won't! I shan't! Set you up with it, indeed! Rummidgin' my young missis's drawers! You don't look like the mos' honestest person in the worl' no how! *I* don't know nuffin 'bout your correcter."

With a quiet, quick dart of her hand, the mulatto gripped her talons around the throat of Seraph, and choked her until she grew full in the face, and dropped the keys; then, drawing her towards the door, she silently thrust her out, closed the door, and locked it on the inside.

All this passed so quietly that one in the next room would not have known what was going on.

Seraph, on the floor outside the door, convulsed, heaved, spluttered, *sneezed,* coughed, *and recovered herself—*

"The Lor' a massy upon me! Dis is wuss 'an de landin' o' de British. I say in dere! you nonation! I'd holler murder, only I won't make a 'fusion to 'sturb de family. But I'll have you put in jail for 'salt and batterin' me! an' for abreakin' open of my missis's drawers. Oh, you won't speak! Never you min'! you'll see! you good for nothin' *poor white man's darter you!"*

There! that was the most insulting taunt a pure-blooded Virginia negro could cast upon a mulatto. And, having spent the force of her fury on this last expletive, Seraph gathered herself up and waddled down stairs, leaving Kate Jumper to go on with her packing.

Kate pursued her task until she had completed it, even to the strapping of the trunks, and then, taking with her the bunch of keys, she went out of the room, locked the door to prevent the re-entrance of her antagonist, Seraph, and took the keys to the chamber of Mrs. Armstrong. She found that lady still seated at the window, knotting with apparent composure.

"Have you done?"

"Yes, madam, every thing is packed and ready, and Mrs. Stuart-Gordon's shawl and hat are laid out upon the bed for her to wear. Here are the keys."

"Very good! I shall keep my room until dinner. When Mrs. Stuart-Gordon returns, let her know that I expect her here. Now, go!"

And she went on very quietly with her knotting. By no outward sign could the most suspicious and acute observer have detected the fell determination of this pitiless mother.

There she sat by the open window, watching the summer sun slowly decline, unmindful, unconscious of the resplendent beauty of the scene stretched out before her—a landscape whose gorgeous glory would have caught the breath from any other beholder. There she sat, watching the sun's splendid descent, impatient for its setting, which would bring Louis and Louise home, and hasten the hour of her departure with her daughter—the hour of her vengeance. There she sat, resolved, though knowing how much Louise loved Louis—ay, and *hating* her for thus loving him—knowing how this separation would torture Louise, and taking a secret and diabolical pleasure in the idea of the torture—smiling grimly to herself at the thought of this separation—smiling grimly at the thought that Louise should suffer for having thus transferred her affections—that Louis should be agonized for having won from herself this love—that General Stuart-Gordon should be humiliated for having doubly mortified her, in the disappointment of her ambitious projects both for herself and her daughter. This signal separation and its cause would lay his pride in the dust. For herself, *she* was too really and essentially proud to care what construction might be put upon her actions. She sat there, stern, erect, resolute, determined, but calm, except when occasionally that diabolical grin distorted her features, going on with her knotting without dropping one stitch, or missing one mesh.

At last, when the sun had sunk behind the mountain, and when the slanting shadows had stretched quite across the river, darkening the whole scene, a rap was heard at her door, and soon after Kate Jumper entered—

"Mrs. Stuart-Gordon has just returned, madam, and is coming up to her room to change her dress for dinner. Let me have the keys."

"Did you deliver my message to her?"

"Yes, madam; but she prefers to dress first."

"Louise pays very little regard to my wishes since her marriage," thought the mother, bitterly; then she said, "Go and tell Mrs. Stuart-Gordon that I am waiting for her here."

The woman had scarcely left the room before the light step and clear voice of Louise was heard tripping and singing up the stairs, a merry, trilling quadrille air. The dancing and the singing abruptly ceased as she reached the door of her mother's apartment, and rapped before venturing to enter.

"Come in, my daughter!" said the voice of the lady, in kinder tones than those she usually employed in speaking to her child, or to any one else in fact.

Louise opened the door softly, and entered the room.

"You have a very unlady-like manner of entering a house and ascending a flight of stairs, my daughter. I am pleased, however, that your boisterousness moderated a little as you neared my door."

"Dear mother, Louis loves to see me merry—encourages me to be wild; and indeed I lately have a tendency that way, so that I sometimes forget you—"

"Oh, I have no doubt in the world that you forget me. It was not *that*, however, of which I wished to speak to you. Come and sit *by my side, Louise.*"

The girl took the indicated seat, the footstool at her mother's feet, and laying her arms over her mother's lap, looked up into her face to see what she was about to say.

"Do you love me, Louise?" asked the lady in a serious tone.

"My dear mother! would you only *let* me love you?"

"Yet for a month past you have neglected and forgotten me for a comparative stranger."

This was partly true, as under *all* the circumstances it was *very* natural. This was true, and Louise could not deny it. She was conscience-stricken and pricked to the heart. She was silent.

"Yes! my child has ceased to love me—my child has forsaken her mother for a comparative stranger!"

Louise hung down her fair head, and the tears began to gather in her eyes and roll down her cheeks.

"My child, that I bore and nursed—that I brought up and educated—that I never would send from me, even to sleep—my *only* child has ceased to love me."

The tears of the daughter were falling fast. She was subdued by the thought that her mother—her proud, lofty mother—should bend thus a supplicant for a share in her child's heart.

"Yes, she has ceased to love her mother: her mother, whose whole and sole thought has been for her welfare alone."

Louise, filled with remorse, had no power of replying.

"Yes, she has ceased to love me—me, who remained through all the best years of my life unmarried for her sake; she has ceased to love me, and I am desolate—a widow, childless, and desolate."

Here, with her deep knowledge of human nature, she purposely touched a chord at which the *bride's* and the *daughter's* heart vibrated to the quick. With the one idea of the young wife, the one idea of wedded love filling her mind, she suddenly recollected that her mother was—a *widow*, and her whole soul filled with an overpowering tenderness of love and pity, and casting her arms around her mother, she exclaimed—

"A *widow!* Oh, my dear, dear mother, forgive me that I never thought of that before! A *widow!* Oh, my mother, I never knew how much sorrow was in that word before! A *widow!* Oh, my poor mother, how much, indeed, you must have suffered! A *widow!* Oh, may the Lord in mercy preserve me from ever becoming—a widow!

And a shudder ran through all her frame.

"Oh, my dear mother, I do love you, will love you, all that you will let me. It is *sweet* to be permitted to love you so, mother."

Mrs. Armstrong soothed and caressed her child.

Had this tenderness in the mother been a customary thing, it would not then have possessed such all-subduing power over Louise. It was the long-desired, unhoped love, that, suddenly manifesting itself, completely subjected the will of the daughter.

And Mrs. Armstrong pressed her to her bosom, smoothed back her golden hair, and kissed her snowy brow, while Louise would murmur softly—

"Oh, it is so sweet to have you love me so, *mother—mother*"—lingering over the last word, "*mother*," slowly, with ineffable tenderness.

Suddenly, Mrs. Armstrong said to her, very gravely—

"Now, my daughter, I have something very serious to say to you."

"Say it, my dear mother."

"Louise, I have been insulted, outraged."

"Insulted! outraged!" repeated Louise, looking up in astonishment.

"Yes, my daughter."

"Insulted! *you?*" she exclaimed, raising herself up in a sitting posture, and gazing at her mother in amazement. "Mother, *you!* Who has dared?"

"General Stuart-Gordon; no less a person."

"General Stuart-Gordon!" reiterated Louise, in stupefied wonder.

"*General Stuart-Gordon.*"

"He! Mother, I am thunderstruck! Mother, am I awake? Shake me, mother."

"You are awake, Louise."

"And sane?—am I sane, mother?"

"And sane, Louise."

"It seems to me that I have the nightmare! I wish I could rouse myself. General Stuart—"

"My dear child, listen; I will tell you all about it. General Stuart-Gordon informed me yesterday that he was about to be married—"

"To be married!"

"My dear child, pray cease these vexatious exclamatory repetitions, and listen to me. Yes, he informed me he was about to be married to Britannia O'Riley—"

"Britannia O'Riley! what! Brighty coming here? Oh—"

"Once more, Mrs. Stuart-Gordon—I mean, my dear Louise—I must entreat you to cease repeating my words; it impedes and embarrasses me. Well, General Stuart-Gordon informed me, as I said, of his approaching marriage with Miss O'Riley. Louise, what do you think of this marriage?"

"I cannot believe it. It cannot be true."

"Why not?"

"It is too unlikely."

"Upon what account?—Miss O'Riley's want of birth—fortune?"

"Oh, no; that is nothing."

"What, then?"

"Why, Brighty's a *girl*, and General Stuart-Gordon is an old gentleman. Oh, you know, of course, mother, it was a joke; *that* was a joke; though I admit that it was *almost* insulting to jest with you about it, mother."

"My dear, it was no joke; it was *truth*. This marriage is to come off in a month."

"No, mother, no; it must be a mistake. It cannot be true."

"I tell you that I am assured of it beyond a possibility of a doubt. Besides, I am not apt to be mistaken in any thing, my daughter."

"But poor, dear Brighty, then—dear, brilliant, sparkling Brighty—to be lost so."

"And that is the light in which *you* view it, Louise. *You*, had you been never so poor, could not have married an old man?"

Louise shuddered and paled.

"Oh, mother, don't; it makes my blood run cold," exclaimed Louise, who fully believed herself the type of all womankind in this respect. "Poor Brighty, dear, radiant Brighty, to be so extinguished. Mother, dear mother, tell her not to have him. Save her."

"I cannot, unfortunately. Miss O'Riley is very capable of marrying a dotard for the sake of attaining a brilliant position. Your sympathy is besides quite thrown away upon Miss O'Riley, who is a clear-headed, cold-hearted, selfish, and calculating woman, who will be happy in her destiny."

"A brilliant position! so is that of the Hindoo suttee a brilliant position, and one, it strikes me, as being as great an immolation as the other. Dearest mother, since you are so kind, and permit me to speak so freely, let me entreat you to talk to General Stuart-Gordon on this subject. Beg him not to take advantage of Brighty's poverty, and her love of elegance, and her inexperience. Tell him Brighty is nothing but a bit of a girl," continued the little matron, "tell him that she will grievously repent it. Tell him to be magnanimous, magnificent, princely. Tell him to adopt Brighty as his *daughter;* to bring her here and make her feel at home among us. Tell him, if he wants to marry, to find some lady near his own age, who will not be compelled to wish him dead all the days of his life, and to leave poor Brighty alone to seek her own share of this world's life, love, and joy."

"You are very much changed, Louise!" said her mother, in surprise—"very much changed. Who would have supposed that you had reflected so much—that you would have confidence to give utterance to your reflections?"

"Mother, it is dearest Louis! He talks with me, and encourages me to talk. He listens to me—stimulates me to think. Oh, mother, I have thought more, heard more, talked more, and *lived* more, in the last month, than in all my passed existence! I seem to have received an impulse—to have taken a new start in life. The vista of a universe seems opening before me; my soul seems to have dropped its fetters—escaped its prison—and revels in liberty and light. And Louis has given me this new life, mother!" The brow of the lady darkened. "And that is the reason, mother, why I do so pity dear Brighty. She closes upon herself the prospect of a happiness like mine"—arrested by a feeling of bashfulness, Louise suddenly stopped in the full-flowing stream of her confidences, and blushed. Soon she recovered her composure and said, "You will speak to General Stuart-Gordon about this, will you not, my mother?"

"My daughter, it was of that I wished to talk to you. I *have* spoken to him upon this subject."

"And he?"

"Became offended."

"And—"

"Used offensive language to me."

"Mother!"

"*Violent* language, Louise."

"*Mother!*"

"Ordered me to quit his roof."

"MOTHER! NO!" exclaimed Louise, starting to her feet, as the blood rushed to her brow.

"Be calm, my daughter. Be composed; be lady-like. Remember yourself. Recollect that all such manifestations of feeling are vulgar. Be quiet—you see that I am."

"Oh, my *dear* mother! but you have been outraged!" said Louise, bursting into tears.

"My daughter, let us talk composedly. It is certain that I cannot *remain* here!"

"Nor *I*, mother!"

"What do you say, Louise?" inquired the mother with surprise and delight, thinking her *paths made very straight* before her. "What *do you say, Louise?*"

"*I say that I cannot* stay here, mother!"

"Explain my daughter."

"*Could* I remain under the roof of a house from which my mother has been driven? No, mother, no! Louis will not expect it. Louis will not desire it. Louis will respect a daughter's feelings. I will entreat him to hire a house and take me hence. We will leave this gorgeous palace to General Stuart-Gordon and any lady he may be pleased to set over it, and we will go into some humbler house, in which, at least, my mother can be safe from insult, and secure of respect."

"A new, revised, and improved edition of love in a cottage," sneered the lady, but quickly remembering that her cue was love and confidence, she replied, "my daughter, I thank you; but this plan of yours is impracticable!"

"Impracticable!"

"Yes, my daughter! Louis is just eighteen. He yet wants three years of his majority. Until that period arrives, he has not a dollar but what his father gives him. *When* that period arrives, he is in possession of all this vast estate. *Until* that period arrives, he has no means of hiring a house, or servants, or in any way supporting himself or his wife, apart from his father."

"Oh, Heaven! what shall I do?"

"You cannot, of course, remain under a roof from which your mother has been expelled?" Louise did not reply. "You do not think of it, I trust, my daughter." Louise was weeping silently. "Why do you not answer, my daughter? You do not think of remaining here after I have been thrust forth."

"Mother, I cannot leave Louis!"

"My child has ceased to love me—my *only* child!"

Here followed the same line of argument, the same logic, eloquence, and passion—the same pathos about the widowhood, the solitude, the desolation—that had melted the heart of Louise in the first of this scene. It subdued her again, and more completely than before. While she laid her head, sobbing, upon her mother's lap, she asked,

"What am I to do, then, mother? Tell me what I am to do?"

"Return with me this evening to Mont Crystal!"

"Mother! mother!"

"If Louis loves you, he will follow you thither. I will invite him to remain, and we will all live there together until the majority of Louis puts him in possession of the Island Estate and The Isle of Rays. Will you agree to this, Louise?"

"Mother!"

"Will you return with me this evening to Mont Crystal?"

"Mother, my heart is breaking, but I will do it."

"You promise this?"

"I promise it."

"God bless you, my daughter."

"God *pity* me, my mother."

The ringing of the dinner-bell aroused them.

"Will you go down, mother?"

"No, my daughter."

"And I, then, mother—what shall I do?"

"Go and prepare for your journey, my daughter; and when you are ready, meet me in the drawing-room."

Louise left the room, weeping.

"Dinner waits, madam," said a servant, rapping softly at the door.

"Let it wait," was the curt reply of the lady, who was adjusting the folds of her ample black velvet cloak.

In a few minutes more, Mrs. Armstrong, in full carriage costume, descended into the hall. General Stuart-Gordon advanced from the drawing-room to meet her.

"Mrs. Armstrong, I have come to solicit your pardon for the intemperate words uttered in my excitement of this morning. Will you honor me by accepting the support of my arm to the drawing-room, in token of forgiveness?" said he, in a deep, earnest, and deprecating tone and manner.

"Sir!" replied the lady, drawing her majestic figure up to its full height; "I bear no malice towards beasts, idiots, or dotards; I only protect myself from their violence in future."

With a grave, deep bow, General Stuart-Gordon receded, and allowed her to pass.

"I ordered my carriage at five o'clock. You will be so good as to see if it waits, sir?" she said in the arrogant tone of an offended despot speaking to a slave, as she sailed on.

"*Certainly*, madam, with pleasure," replied the General, with a second and deeper bow.

She entered the drawing-room, and stood there waiting until Louise should join her. She had not long to wait. Louise soon entered, arrayed for her ride in a white crape shawl, white bonnet and veil. Her veil was down, to hide her flowing tears.

"Your carriage attends you, madam," announced General Stuart-Gordon, re-entering the room.

"Are you quite ready, my daughter?" inquired the lady.

"*Yes, quite ready, mother*; but, oh! I must see Louis first. I have not seen him for an hour—not since we returned from rowing. I do not know where he *can* be," replied the bride, in a distressing tone.

"Where are you going, Louise?" inquired the General, walking up to his daughter-in-law.

"Home with mother!" she murmured, sinking weeping into a chair.

"May I inquire, Mrs. Louis, if your husband is advised of this proceeding on your part?"

"No, sir."

"And you leave this roof without his knowledge or consent?"

"Oh! sir," murmured the poor little girl, in an almost inaudible voice, "I cannot find him. My mother—alone—insulted—all the child she has got—how *could* you?" and melted into a sea of tears.

"Sir, address your conversation to ME, who well know how to answer you—and do not browbeat the child, like a dastard!" exclaimed Mrs. Armstrong, striding up, and placing herself between them, and in front of Louise.

"Then, madam, I desire to know the meaning of all this."

"It is very plain, sir. My daughter returns with me to Mont Crystal."

"And for what purpose, and to what end?"

"To reside henceforth under my own roof."

Here Louise raised her tearful face from the handkerchief in which it was buried, and looked up with surprise. General Stuart-Gordon's brow grew hard and stern, as that of the lady to whom he spoke, as he replied—

"And I say, madam, that Mrs. Louis does not stir out of this house without her husband's permission being first obtained."

"Ha! ha! we shall see. Give me your arm, my daughter!"

"Lay off your bonnet and shawl, Louise!" commanded the General, in a tone so stern and peremptory, that the poor girl started, and instinctively and hurriedly obeyed.

"My daughter, are you mad? What are you doing? Resume your bonnet, and let us go!"

"Do not budge, Mrs. Louis. Do not stir a step."

"Give me your arm, Louise! I *command* you!"

"Move at your *peril*, Mrs. Louis!"

"Am I to be *obeyed*, Louise?" sternly demanded the lady.

"Do you *hear* me, Mrs. Louis?" thundered the General.

"Oh pity, Lord!" prayed Louise, with clasped hands and blanched cheeks, her very tears congealed with terror—looking from one antagonist to the other.

"Ah! good! here is Louis!" exclaimed the General, as Louis Stuart-Gordon quietly entered the room, and stood arrested in an attitude of surprise, in the midst of them.

"Louis! Louis!" exclaimed Louise, as, throwing out her hands, she flew to his arms, as a bird to her nest—flew from the storm of anger raging around her, and casting her fair arms up around his neck, and burying her head in his bosom, she hung there, palpitating, her pale gold locks and white muslin drapery flowing over his black dress. And Louis! He stood there, encircling her with one arm, while with the other hand he stroked her locks and shoulders—soothing her perturbation—and instinctively mesmerizing her. Meanwhile the war of words raged on.

"Sir, my daughter returns with me to Mont Crystal!"

"Madam! my son's wife abides under our roof!" And Louise shuddered, even in the shelter of her husband's arms.

It was now that Louis Stuart-Gordon looked up, and with a gesture of the most imposing command, arrested the storm of controversy. Then, with a silent but peremptory inquiry, he demanded the explanation of the scene. Both antagonists essayed to speak at once. Mrs. Armstrong turned full upon him, and commenced—

"Mr. Stuart-Gordon, circumstances *have* transpired, and are *about* to transpire, that constrain me to remove my daughter from this house—" while General Stuart-Gordon was saying—

"Louis, this lady designs to separate you and your wife!"

"My dear father, let me entreat you to grant the lady precedence in this explanation," said Louis.

"Certainly, my son! Be so good as to proceed, madam."

And Mrs. Armstrong, in a few curt, haughty words, explained the motive of her act.

"So you perceive, Louis, that this good lady wishes to separate you from your wife. Of course you will not consent to any such meassure," decided the General.

"My daughter SHALL return with me!" persisted the lady, with awful sternness.

"My son's wife 'SHALL' abide where she is!" *concluded* the General.

Louise started and shuddered in the arms *of her husband.* Louis pressed her closer to his bosom, stooped and soothed her; and then, erecting his slight but elegant form, he waved his hand, and imposed silence by a gesture full of dignity. And, looking from one to the other, with something of grave rebuke in his tone and manner, he said—

"My honored father! and my esteemed mother-in-law! you do battle over my wife as though she were a slave in whom both of you possessed a property—to whom both of you laid a claim. *This must cease!* 'Shall' and 'shall not' are terms that must not be applied to my wife. Commands and threats are things that she must not suffer. Louise is free! free, as God made all creatures; and she must not be deprived of her divine birthright—of her own God-given freedom! She shall direct her own life, control her own destiny. No one shall compel her choice—no one shall even so much as unduly influence her will. Louise shall decide in this matter, as in all others, for herself—and," continued the young man, growing a little pale, "and I will abide by her decision."

"Good! I accept the condition!" said Mrs. Armstrong. "Let Louise decide for herself. *I* too will abide by her decision!"

"BAD! I say—it will not do! You commit an error, Louis! *You* give this girl her own way, and her will must succumb to the first strong will that it encounters—must succumb to her mother's. She has never been accustomed to self-guidance—never will be fit for self-guidance."

"Never, unless she is permitted to guide herself, my father! Enough! We will have the decision of Louise, and accept it."

"And abide by it," chimed in Mrs. Armstrong, who felt no doubt in her mind as to the favorable (for her plan) decision of her daughter.

"Zounds! *can* there be two sides to this question?" exclaimed General Stuart-Gordon, put past his gallantry.

"Look up, Louise; look up, my own!" murmured Louis, bending over her until his lips were at her ear. "Look up, Louise, and set this vexed question at rest. No one shall constrain your will. Look up and tell us—will you remain with me, or depart with your mother?"

She pressed closer to him, weeping.

"Say, my darling—will you remain with me—"

"With *you*, Louis—with *you*, angel Louis—you, you," murmured Louise, dropping words and tears both in his bosom.

"What does she say? You are not to coax her," exclaimed the mother.

"She says that she will remain with me," said Louis.

Mrs. Armstrong turned pale, strode up to her daughter, and exclaimed, bitterly and sorrowfully—

"My child! mine *only* child! do you abandon me thus? me in my age—me in my *widowhood*—me to endless, childless solitude? Oh, Louise!"

"Mother, no—no!" exclaimed the poor bride, suddenly starting from the gentle arms of Louis, and throwing herself upon the bosom of her mother. "Mother, no! I will go with you."

"Come, then; your shawl and bonnet—where are they?"

"But, Louis! oh, Louis!" once more casting herself in the arms of her husband.

"Again, my child, will you come?"

"Yes, I will go with you—no, stay with Louis! Mother! Louis! mother!—oh, *mercy, Lord!*"

And, broken between conflicting claims and emotions, the poor bride and child fainted over the arm of her husband.

"THANK GOD!" exclaimed General Stuart-Gordon, savagely, in the tone of an oath. "Take her to her room, Louis; lock the door on the inside, and remain with her. Don't be alarmed—a fainting-fit is nothing. Call Seraph to attend you, and be quick, for she will recover in five minutes, and all this trouble will be to go over again."

And Louis, raising her in his arms, and calling loudly for assistance, bore her from the room. Mrs. Armstrong started to follow, but General Stuart-Gordon, with a spring, placed himself before her in the doorway.

"Let me pass, sir."

"No, you shall not, by Heaven, madam! Louis is a fool; and you are—*Mrs. Armstrong!* Thank God that I am alive to save my daughter-in-law from perishing through the folly of her husband, or being destroyed by the cruelty of her mother."

"*Let me pass, sir.*"

"Your carriage waits, madam, and your way to it lies through the other door."

"LET ME PASS, SIR."

"Your carriage waits, madam. Will it please you to deliver us from the inconvenience of your presence?"

Haggard with rage, but perfectly impotent, at least for the *time being, Mrs. Armstrong turned abruptly, strode from the room,* entered her carriage, and was driven to Mont Crystal, there to brood secretly over schemes of deeper vengeance.

CHAPTER IV.

THE OLD MAN'S DARLING.

The more than Michal of his bloom,
The Abishag of his age.
Christopher Smart's Song of David.

Louise recovered from her fainting fit to find her mother gone. All night she wept bitterly. The next morning she awoke pale and hollow-eyed. She wrote a letter full of the tenderest expressions of filial affection, and sent it to Mont Crystal. This letter was returned with the seal unbroken. Then she would have set out for Mont Crystal immediately, but a thunder-storm arising—a violent equinoctial storm, lasting all the afternoon and evening—prevented her. The next day, from the flood, the roads were impassable for a carriage, and Louise could not ride on horseback. She was forced to content herself with writing another and more earnest and impassioned letter to her mother. The second letter, like the first, was returned unopened—and Louise went to bed and wept herself to sleep.

General Stuart-Gordon had ridden over to The Crags that afternoon, to pass the evening with Brighty. It was very late when he returned. He entered the wainscoted parlor with a singularly light and brisk step, threw off his coat, drew on his wadded gown, and settled himself comfortably in his study-chair by the side of the table to read the papers that had arrived in the evening's mail. Running his eyes over the columns, his attention was arrested by the following advertisement:—

"NEXT OF KIN.

"If the heirs of Riley Frobisher O'Riley, of Athlone, county of Westmeath, Ireland, be yet living, and should see this advertisement, they are requested to report themselves to James Frobisher, Secretary of Legation to the British Embassy at Washington, where they will hear something to their advantage."

"'Riley Frobisher O'Riley, late of Athlone?' Why, he was the father of my Brighty,—this concerns my Brighty," thought the General, reading over the advertisement again, "'Will hear something to their advantage'—to *her* advantage—for there is only she. That means that a fortune is left her, if it means any thing! Oh, Brighty! shall I lose you at last? Shall this sole privilege of making your future prosperous be taken from me? But this is selfish. I said her happiness was dearer to me than any thing else, yet now I am alarmed at a piece of good fortune promised her; yet, after all, this may be a mistake. I will write at once, and ascertain what this means."

And, turning around to his writing-table, he penned a hasty letter of inquiry to the Secretary of Legation, and, ringing for Apollo, bade him, late as it was, to saddle a horse and take it to the post-office, that it might go out in the morning's mail.

"It will then be two days before I can receive an answer," thought the General, as he retired "to bed, but not to sleep."

Two days elapsed—a week passed away—General Stuart-Gordon had received no answer as yet to his letter to the British Secretary of Legation. He had not failed to mention the advertisement to Britannia, but she took it so quietly—seemed to think it of so little importance—that his fears had been set at rest; and, indeed, his self-respect had prevented him from expressing to Britannia an uneasiness for which at heart he condemned himself. He had even grown to think that the notice might possibly have reference to some one else.

Upon the second week after the family quarrel, one evening, as soon as Louise had, weeping, left the oak-parlor, and as soon as Louis had, sympathizing, followed her, General Stuart-Gordon, putting on his dressing-gown and slippers, and sinking into his easy-chair, began to make himself comfortable by stretching out his feet and resting them upon the fire-irons, and drawing his candle-stand laden with papers to his side. He had scarcely commenced reading, when Apollo rode up to the door, and, jumping from his horse, entered the room with the evening mail.

"Give them to me, here, Apollo!" said the General, dropping his paper; and Apollo, undrawing the strings of the bag, and taking hold of the bottom by the corners, emptied the letters out.

There were letters from exporting grain and tobacco merchants of Baltimore and New York; there were political letters; and there was *one* that was immediately torn open and read. It bore the Washington post-mark. It was from James Frobisher, Esquire, Secretary of the British Embassy from the Court of St. James, to Washington. It ran thus:—

"WASHINGTON, *April* 30, 18—.

"*To General Stuart-Gordon*:—

"SIR: Yours of the 20th April is at hand. The advertisement of the heirs of Riley O'Riley in the Intelligencer of the 10th April, to which your letter alludes, relates to the following facts, viz.:

"Joyce Riley O'Riley, last Earl of Clonmachnois, died at Castle Clonmachnois, near Athlone, county of Westmeath, Ireland, on the 22d of last February, aged ninety years. He died intestate and without heirs, unless the daughter of the late Riley O'Riley, the youngest son of the Earl's fourth son, can be found.

"If this young lady lives in the person of Miss Britannia O'Riley, and can prove her identity, she is sole heiress to the late Earl's titles and estates, and Countess of Clonmachnois in her own right. I shall do myself the honor of waiting upon you, in relation to this subject, in the course of the week.

"Sir, yours, most respectfully,

"JAMES FROBISHER."

The letter dropped from the hands of General Stuart-Gordon, and a mortal coldness and weakness seized his frame; his heart sunk.

"This *is* a blow. Just Heaven! this *is* a blow. Within three days of my marriage, too."

And he arose and walked up and down the floor, with his hands clasped behind his back, and his head bowed upon his bosom, as was his custom when troubled.

"Well—well! well—well! this is severe—this is heavy! She will no longer have a reason for marrying a man old enough to be her father—and yet I would have made her happy. I feel that I should have done so. But it is over, it is over, this last, last dream. Countess of Clonmachnois! Oh, Brighty, after all, will you ever meet with one who will cherish you tenderly as I have done?"

General Stuart-Gordon did not go to bed that night. Early the next morning, without saying one word upon the subject to any member of his family, he took pen, ink, and paper, and wrote the following note to Britannia:—

"ISLE OF RAYS, *May* 15*th*.

"DEAREST BRITANNIA: Let your most earnest and sincere friend be the first to wish you joy in your dawn of fortune. I have just received a letter from the Secretary of Legation, and am pleased to be the first to announce to you the brilliant change that awaits you—to be the first to address you by your new title.

"There! that is as far as I can go, and as much as I can do, Britannia. I cannot offer you my congratulations in person; I have no strength to do so. I am stricken, Brighty—I am stricken.

"Like the slave in the Brazilian mines, I have found a diamond of the first water, only to see it snatched from me, and set in a coronet.

"When I found a young, beautiful, accomplished, and amiable girl, alone and unprotected, a girl of elegant manners and refined tastes, exposed to all the evils of an unsettled life, I had thought to take that girl to my bosom, and, by cherishing her tenderly, to have made her happy and won her affections.

"But all this is changed now. The Countess of Clonmachnois has a splendid destiny before her. The diamond will blaze all the more brilliantly when set in the coronet; Britannia will lend lustre even to the high rank she will reach.

"Brighty—for to me you are Brighty, and no countess—Brighty, then, in three days more we were to have been married. I know the strict integrity of your heart, and I know that you would have kept your engagement under all circumstances, but I release you fully and freely from it. I wish you joy. God bless you, my dear Brighty.

"I inclose you the letter of the Secretary of Legation. There will be no difficulty in proving your identity; and I need not say, dearest Britannia, that I am at your command always, to render any service in my power.

"Your friend, as ever,
"Cartwright Stuart-Gordon."

He folded, sealed, and directed this letter, and calling Apollo, bade him saddle a horse, and take it to The Crags.

Louise kept her room with a nervous headache all that day. Two weeks of crying had completely exhausted the delicate girl.

Louis came to breakfast, looking disturbed. General Stuart-Gordon told him, gravely, to take comfort; that the evil fates would probably be conciliated by the sacrifice of *one* member of any *one* family, and that *that* member would probably be himself. And, without explaining his meaning further, General Stuart-Gordon left the oak parlor, and shut himself up alone in his library, trying to read a Hebrew dictionary, *placed upside down before him. He did not go down to dinner.*

Soon after dinner, Apollo Belvidere returned from his errand to The Crags, and rapped at the door of the library.

"Come in," groaned the General.

And Apollo came in, bowing and scraping, and holding his hat in one hand, and a little note in the other.

"Did you find the young lady?"

"Yes, sir."

"Well, how was she—how was the family?"

"Miss O'Riley and Miss Somerville, sir, were well, sir; they was a-sittin' at the table, sir, and old Major Somerville, sir, he was a-prophesying of the Bible, sir."

"Well, what is that you have in your hand—a letter?"

"Yes, sir."

And, with another bow and scrape, Apollo advanced and handed the note.

It was a little three-cornered-folded thing, and directed in the hand of Britannia. He opened it hastily, and read as follows:—

"Will General Stuart-Gordon favor Britannia O'Riley with an interview this evening?"

That was all.

"Saddle my horse quickly, Apollo—then come and assist me to dress. Tell Seraph to bring me some hot water," exclaimed General Stuart-Gordon, rising hastily, and passing from his library on his way to his bed-chamber.

In half an hour, General Stuart-Gordon was on his road to The Crags. In two hours, he had arrived.

The family had just arisen from tea. Major Somerville, as usual, had retired to rest. Susan and Britannia were sewing, and Anna was reading "Paradise and the Peri" aloud to them. Anna, as was her invariable custom, as soon as a visitor entered, arose and withdrew. General Stuart-Gordon advanced, bowing.

"Good evening, my dear Miss Somerville," he said, pressing Susan's hand. Then going to Britannia: "How shall I address you now, madam, in offering again, and in person, my earnest congratulations upon the splendid future opening before you?" he asked, in a very low voice.

Britannia arose from her seat, giving him her hand, and looking at Susan, said, quietly—

"My dear Miss Somerville, I wish to converse alone with General Stuart-Gordon for a few minutes, if you will give me leave."

Susan smilingly arose, and left the room.

Britannia reseated herself, pointing out a chair on the opposite corner of the fireplace to the General. He took it, seated himself, and, drawing up his portly form, and throwing one arm over the back of the chair, addressed his companion as follows:—

"Well, Britannia! I said that I was at your command, and, accordingly, when you summoned me to your presence I lost no time in obeying you, though I could have wished, Britannia, that you had spared me the pain of this interview—at least for a few days—at least until I had in some measure recovered from the shock of this most heavy blow, and regained a portion of my calmness and self-control. However, Britannia, I am here, and ready to serve you." All this time, Britannia had sat quite still, looking down upon her own white and jewelled hands, that lay one upon the other on her lap. She did not speak, even now that he had finished his sentence.

"Well, Britannia, what do you wish to do first? How can I assist you? Tell me; I am quite at your orders. Why do you not reply, Britannia?"

"I do not wish any thing done *until after Sunday*, General," said Britannia. General Stuart-Gordon started—looked at her earnestly. *Sunday* was to have been their wedding-day.

"Oh, Britannia! But this allusion is thoughtless or wanton on your part."

"Why, General? Have we not enough to keep us busy until Sunday? After Sunday, can we not take Baltimore and Washington in our route, and attend to this business?"

"Oh, Britannia, cease to torture me! You know that this is all changed—all—all—all!"

"Then you *do* really mean to break with me, General?"

"I *do* really mean to release you from your engagement to myself, Britannia."

"And upon what account?"

"Upon account of the new and brilliant position in which you will shortly find yourself. I told you my reasons in my letter." Britannia arose from her seat, and, coming around, rested her hand upon the back of his chair, while she asked, gravely—

"My friend, why did you write that letter to me?"

"Brighty, oh, Brighty! all is over. You know that I feel it too well—too surely—too powerfully."

"My friend, this grows *very serious*. Explain yourself," said Britannia, very gravely.

"Britannia, *my letter* explained this. Do *not affect to misunderstand* me."

"*Your letter* and *your conversation*, General *Stuart-Gordon, coincide* perfectly—neither contradicting the other. *Both*, however, are unintelligible to me."

"How! Do you not understand that by the death of your great-grandfather, the aged Earl of Clonmachnois, and by the previous demise of every intervening heir, you are left sole heiress of his titles and estates, and that you are, at this moment, Countess of Clonmachnois in your own right? Do you not understand *that?*"

"Yes! I understand, believe, and accept that, as though it were one of the thirty-nine articles of the Christian faith!" exclaimed Brighty, lifting her eyes, gleaming with pride and mirth, to his face.

"You do!" exclaimed the General, irritated and offended at her smile. "*Then* you understand that you may choose from the *élite* of young aristocracy! You understand that there is *now* no necessity to sacrifice yourself to an elderly man, whom you cannot love!" Britannia had kept her eyes steadily on him during this sharp speech. At its close she drew her elegant form up to its proudest height, lifted her regal head until her ringlets, though drooping, scarcely reached her bosom, and said, lowly and slowly—

"My position necessarily exposes me to many humiliations, but that which is most difficult to bear is a taunt from General Stuart-Gordon!".

All the chivalry of Virginia started in his veins to reproach him for this rudeness. He arose, and with a stately suavity took her hand, bowed over it, and said, gravely—

"Forgive me, madam! Make some allowance for the many disturbances of my mind by this sudden and grievous calamity—the loss of a treasure so nearly received."

"Sir!" said Britannia, "a girl who would have accepted your hand from *merely* convenient motives, is no treasure to be regretted!"

"But, Britannia, recollect. *You* said, yourself, that you did not love me." And his whole frame shook, as he wiped the perspiration from his brow.

"*Nor do I*, as poets, painters, and players understand the term. My friend, you are seriously disturbed; so seriously disturbed that I must forget the injurious language you use towards me, and I must try to reassure you; let us understand each other. Will you sit down? I have never seen you so greatly moved. I regret this exceedingly—regret that *any* circumstances should possess the power of moving you so. Sir, I beseech you, recover your self-possession—I scarcely recognize General Stuart-Gordon thus."

"When I am about to *lose* you, Britannia."

"But you are *not* to lose me, my dearest friend."

"But you never loved me, Britannia; and now, as there exists no necessity for your sacrificing yourself, you shall not do it."

"Again! You urge that point so strenuously. No; I do not love you after the manner of young ladies who sigh over sentimental poetry, and die over doleful ditties; I am incapable of the thing. Nor do I lament my incapacity for the capricious and evanescent emotion; but I have a very profound friendship for you, General—a friendship that I have for no other human being—and a very high respect for you, a respect that makes me, with all my pride, regret that I have the power of moving you so; and I have to bring to mind David, Solomon, Marc Antony, and all the great heroes of antiquity, who in the grave autumn of their lives have thus forgotten their high self-appreciation, in order to understand you, sir!"

"It is because you love me not, while I love you, Britannia!" said General Stuart-Gordon, pressing her hand with grave tenderness. "Brighty, I had hoped, by blessing your life with all my power, to have won your heart. What can I offer you that the world will not lay at your feet?"

Again that *inexplicable* gleaming smile of suppressed and self-mocking mirth puzzled and answered the General. Rising with dignity, he said—

"This has continued long enough, madam. I am at your service when you please to advise me of any assistance I can render you in this affair. Good evening, madam. Pray make my excuses to Miss Somerville. Once more, good evening, madam;" and, bowing very low, General Stuart-Gordon raised his hat from the table, and was passing out. But just as his hand was laid upon the lock of the door, the jewelled fingers of Brighty fell upon his wrist. He turned around.

"Will you come back?"

"At your command, madam."

"Will you sit down?"

He replied by seating himself, throwing himself back, and preparing to listen to her.

"It is a great thing to get a character for integrity, fidelity, and magnanimity; and I should like very well to own such a one," said Brighty, as if *communing with herself*; "un*fortunately for the success* of my wish, this dear General contends the crown of generosity with me! Well! let him take it!" Then turning to where General Stuart-Gordon sat in offended majesty, she said—

"I am Countess of Clonmachnois in my own right, am I not?"

"I presume there can be no doubt of the question, madam?"

"Of Castle Clonmachnois, Athlone, county of Westmeath, Ireland."

"Correct as a city directory, madam."

"That has a very magnificent sound! It is quite as brilliant as the flashing of the frost and ice that lay upon the dead flowers in the garden of Mont Crystal,"

"Yes, Britannia," said the General, gravely and mournfully, and again overcome in her presence, "yes, Britannia, but my life is the blighted winter garden, and your fortunes are the ice and sleet that have killed it with cold brilliance, and covered it with a frozen and glittering shroud."

"That is to say, my title, if I return to Ireland, Countess of Clonmachnois, and my estates, the castle and lands of Clonmachnois!"

"Yes."

"Oh! the vast difference between names and things! A month ago I was called by Mrs. Armstrong a dependant, while I was simply myself, Britannia O'Riley; to-day I am called Countess of Clonmachnois, still being myself, Britannia O'Riley!—a wayward girl, with some natural graces, and some acquired accomplishments—very proud—not of the accident of birth, but by the accident of an unusual development of the brain in the region of self-esteem. Listen to me, sir! I was proud as a Governess. I could not be prouder as an Empress! I could not be unfaithful, ungrateful, inconstant, as *either!*" Here Brighty dashed the flashing tears from her eyes, and went on—

"Set yourself at rest, my dearest and best friend. If there is any generosity, it will be upon your part, who will take a petulant and penniless girl to your heart and home!" and stooping down, Brighty offered her cheek to his kiss.

"*Penniless*, Brighty!" he exclaimed, in scarcely repressed astonishment.

"Yes, listen! This Castle of Clonmachnois! It is a ruin—not half as good as this old house we sit in. The estates of Clonmachnois consist of some two or three hundred acres of unreclaimed and unreclaimable morass. The rent of Clonmachnois might scarcely be collected from a few half-naked and half-starved wretches, who have found miserable shelter in the mud huts built upon the meagre spots of half dry land that are dotted about in the bog, like stepping-stones in a marsh. The last Earl of Clonmachnois died, since he is dead, in the deepest poverty—his sons and grandsons having perished before, in their efforts to retrieve their fortunes—some under the burning sun of Hindostan, some amid the snows of Upper Canada, and some in the forests of Brazil. All that remains to me is the barren title—the bitter mockery. Oh! for Heaven's sake, General, keep it a secret, lest democratic Virginia should amuse itself at the expense of the beggar Countess! I have not pride enough to defy ridicule. Only Mrs. Armstrong has pride enough for *that!*"

General Stuart-Gordon was somewhat relieved; still, with a shade of uneasiness, he inquired—

"But how know you all this, Britannia?"

"Oh! from the correspondence of my father and my uncles—old letters in my possession."

"These will be necessary to prove your identity, if there is any call for them. Dearest Britannia, I am so relieved."

"That I have not a fortune."

"It is selfish, Britannia, but it is human."

"I wish I had a fortune to bring you."

"And I wish to confer every thing upon *you*, Brighty."

"But I do not understand why this English Secretary of Legation should take such an interest in discovering a beggared heiress."

"Nor I, Britannia; and it gives me uneasiness. Depend upon it, Britannia, this inheritance is not the trifle you think it."

And rising now, as it was getting late, he took his leave, and departed. Returning home with a somewhat lighter heart than he had set out with, still he wondered why any one should take the trouble of advertising the heiress of a ruin half sunk in a bog.

The mystery was soon explained.

The next morning, as General Stuart-Gordon sat upon the piazza, enjoying his cigar, his paper, and the beautiful landscape stretched out before him, he saw a travelling-carriage descend the road leading from a neighboring village, and taking the direction to the little bridge, recently constructed, connecting the bank of the river with The Isle of Rays, pass over it, and, entering upon the circular carriage road leading to the front entrance of the mansion, drive slowly up and pause. The coachman jumped from the box, opened the door, let down the steps, and stood aside to let a gentleman descend. The General arose, and advanced to receive his visitor. He was a neatly and elegantly dressed man, of about twenty-six years of age, tall, slender, handsome, dark-complexioned, and of very graceful manners and charming address.

"I have the honor of addressing General Stuart-Gordon?"

"That is my name, sir."

"I am James Frobisher, of the British Embassy."

"I am happy to see you, sir. Walk in," said the General, bowing, and leading the way to the oak parlor.

"I shall feel obliged if you will grant me a private interview, sir."

"Certainly, sir, with great pleasure. Will you accompany me to the library?"

The handsome visitor bowed gracefully, and followed his conductor to the library. As soon as they were seated—

"I presume, sir, that I am speaking to the guardian of Miss Britannia O'Riley?" inquired the visitor.

"Sir, I am, in *some sort*, the guardian of that young lady."

"You know her intimately, then?"

"I do, sir."

"Where was she educated? What is she like?"

"At Hartford, Connecticut, sir; and she is *like* a beautiful, elegant, and accomplished woman."

"I am pleased to hear you say so, sir. Is she at your house at this time? If so, how soon can I be presented to her?"

"Sir, the young lady is at present on a visit of some weeks to a young friend, whose residence is two miles distant. If you wish it, I will send a messenger to announce your visit at any hour you may name."

"Thank you, sir. Will it be asking too much of your goodness to request your company on this visit?"

"Oh, no, sir; I will attend you with pleasure, at any time."

"Then the sooner the better, my dear sir, as I am impatient to be presented to this young lady."

General Stuart-Gordon rung the bell and said—

"I will send a messenger immediately to announce our visit, and we will set out in half an hour. Excuse me a moment, sir"—and, going to a writing-table, he wrote—

"MY DEAREST BRITANNIA—Mr. Frobisher is here, and we will both be with you in an hour.

"C. S-G."

and folded it, just as Apollo made his appearance at the door.

"Take this to Miss O'Riley." The man bowed and withdrew.

"As you are the young lady's guardian, and as I have but a few days to remain, I will tell you, sir, the motive of my anxiety to be presented to her. In a word, it is this: The Castle of Clonmachnois is a ruin; the estates are dwindled down to a few acres of marsh land, tenanted by a few wretched peasants, who are not able to pay for the mud huts in which they starve."

"This coincides with what I have heard from the young lady herself, sir."

"Nothing, therefore, remains but the title."

"That is understood, sir."

"Well, sir; I am a distant relative of the family of Clonmachnois. I have an ample fortune, and am under no necessity to marry an heiress of *property*. I wish to get into the House of Peers, for the sake of serving there the interests of Ireland. My father has interest at Court, and has obtained for me the promise of the reversion of the title of Earl of Clonmachnois, in the event of my marrying the heiress of that house."

General Stuart-Gordon did not reply. He sat staring at the young and handsome speaker with the frank and graceful manners, as though he been the Gorgon that had turned him into stone. Happily the General sat with his back to the window, so that the young man could not see the dismay blanching his countenance as he continued his discourse—

"Yes; that is the reason why I wish, without delay, to be presented to this young lady, to see whether she is by education and manners fitted to be introduced to London society."

"Sir," said the General, "I have never seen a more elegant or accomplished woman than Britannia O'Riley. You will see her, however, this morning. There is no carriage-road leading from The Isle of Rays to The Crags, so that we shall have to get into the saddles;" and again ringing the bell, General Stuart-Gordon gave directions for two horses to be saddled. In a few minutes the two gentlemen were on horseback, and ambling towards The Crags, the younger traveller stopping frequently in *the ascent, and turning to* look with a *poet's enthusiasm at the entrancing* beauty, sublimity, and splendor of the landscape of mountains, rocks, falls, river, isle, and verdant banks, with all the glories of the earth and sky, doubled and reflected in the clear water.

"Why, this is a scene of divine beauty. There is nothing on the Rhine like this. Nothing in Switzerland, or Italy, like this. The Isle of Rays! It scintillates and sparkles like a diamond. Emits lines of light like a cluster of darting sunbeams. I wish my friend Turner were here, to sketch this Eden."

Moody and silent, the General scarcely heard or replied to the enthusiastic admiration of his companion. They reached The Crags at last, rapped, were admitted. Britannia and Susan Somerville arose to receive their visitors. General Stuart-Gordon presented "Mr. Frobisher." Britannia received him with a courtesy, and placing her hand in that of the General, returned the pressure with which he greeted it. General Stuart-Gordon looked from Britannia to Frobisher, to note their mutual effect upon each other. He saw in Frobisher the surprise, the quick and ardent admiration he expected to find. He saw in Britannia the impassable dignity, presenting the cold and brilliant surface that ever distinguished her manners to strange gentlemen. They were all seated. The presence of Susan Somerville restrained conversation upon the subject of the inheritance. They discussed general topics—the beauty of the spring—the splendor of the landscape stretching down before them, and visible at a great distance from this bleak height. Then they discussed Washington, Mr. Jefferson, Thomas Moore, who was then there, and, in short, every thing, but the business nearest the hearts of all. General Stuart-Gordon perceived that Frobisher's admiration of Britannia grew by what it fed on. And very soon he arose to take his leave, as this was only an experimental visit.

"You have seen Miss O'Riley, sir," said the General, as soon as they were on the road.

"Yes, sir."

"And you are pleased with her, no doubt."

"Sir, I feel that any praise of mine of that young lady, would be an impertinence. She is without a peer!"

Both gentlemen now sunk into silence, each occupied with his own thoughts. They reached The Isle of Rays in time for dinner. Jealous as he was, General Stuart-Gordon, with Virginian hospitality, invited and pressed his visitor to become his guest while he should remain in the neighborhood, and, after some hesitation, the young man accepted his invitation, remarking that nothing in America struck him more forcibly than the resemblance between English country life and Virginia country life. That it appeared to him that the planters had retained, in a great degree, the domestic manners and customs of their English fathers.

At dinner, the young stranger was presented to Mr. Stuart-Gordon. Louise did not make her appearance, nor did the young man see her while he remained. It would have saved him from a serious mistake, and all parties from much future sorrow, if he had.

General Stuart-Gordon was absent and taciturn during the meal. When the wine was placed upon the table, the General arose, and bidding Louis entertain his guest, excused himself upon the plea of urgent business, and left the room. In truth, he could not stand his suspense any longer. He must know what impression Frobisher had made upon Britannia. He mounted his horse, and rode rapidly up the ascent of The Crags. It was sunset when he started. The full moon had arisen before he was half way up The Crags, and was flooding with a silver glory the whole refulgent landscape; but he did not pause to look at the river, rolling on in a torrent of light between the dark rocks, or as The Isle of Rays, with its rivulets and waterfalls, glanced in lines of silver light under the moonbeams. He saw neither the glory of the heavens nor the splendor of the earth. He saw nothing but the black shadow of the Crag House high up before him, and he sped on towards it. The sweet notes of the violin floated out on the moonlit air as he neared the house. Britannia, Susan, and the two women, were out on the porch, and George was playing the fiddle for them. Brighty separated herself from the party, and advanced into the silver light to meet him, just as he had got down from his horse.

"I am very glad you came again—very glad. That stiff and formal call, this morning, could scarcely be called a visit. As you may judge, I wanted to see you, also, after our comedy of yesterday evening." Somewhat startled by the friendliness of her manner, he drew her arm within his own, and, instead of going on to the house, he took her to walk down the crags.

"Well, Britannia, what do you think of this young Frobisher?"

"*His person* and manners are faultless, and *his dress the perfection* of exquisite elegance—"

"And his *mind*—his conversation—what do you think of that, Britannia?"

"His mind appears to be highly cultivated, and his conversation at once profound and brilliant."

"Oh, Heaven!" growled the General. "Britannia, do you know that this young man—this Adonis of the faultless figure and face, and the elegant dress and *address*—this Apollo of the profound and brilliant discourse—has come to this country with the design of marrying you?"

"Without ever having seen me? Cool and confident, that."

"Nay; he wished to see you, before deciding—"

"A prudent precaution, to ascertain if I would please him, and pass in good English society. Very flattering *that*, also."

"He is very much pleased with you, Britannia—"

"How kind of him."

"He admires you excessively."

"Does he? 'I'll be at charges for a looking-glass,' and set up o' nights to admire myself."

"You are gay, Britannia."

"Oh! look at the glorious heavens above, and look at them again reflected in the waters below; see The Isle of Rays coquetting with the moon—glancing back laugh for smile, and flash for beam; hear the cataract shouting as it leaps into the river, dashing up millions of diamond sparks; see the solemn dark rocks watching the play with grave joy, like demure chaperons of young folks at a ball. Oh, I *am* glad and gay to-night."

"I would *I* were—this young man, Britannia."

"Well! what is it now?

'He hums and he hankers, he frets and he cankers,
You never can please him, do a' that you can;
He's peevish and jealous of a' the young fellows,'"

sung Brighty, changing her manner to one of lightest merriment.

"Be serious, Britannia, for I am."

"Instanter, sir! I am as serious as an owl."

"I was about to say that this young man will certainly propose to you."

"Exactly! Now we are going to rehearse yesterday's scene over again."

"You are in one of your wayward humors to-night, Britannia."

"Speak, sir, if you please—I attend," said Brighty, now *really* serious.

"I wish, then, to set before you the claims this young Frobisher has to your attention.

You see what his personal merits are, besides which he is wealthy. He is promised the reversion of the title that you will bear; he admires and wishes to marry you. Finally, he can place you near the head of London society."

"Have you done, sir?"

"Yes."

"Then, if this gentleman should honor me with the offer of his hand, I should most respectfully decline it."

"Why, Britannia?"

"Why? First, because I am pledged."

"But I release you."

"Secondly, then, because I could not be proud of him."

"Not proud of him—handsome, elegant, accomplished, and a member of the English aristocracy."

"No, I could not honor him in my heart. He wants the *prestige* of age, wisdom, a name made glorious by *himself;* he wants *all*, in fact, that I most highly honor in you."

"But, Britannia, he may gain all this—nay, his sun may be rising to its meridian glory while mine will be declining."

"Lastly, then, I must refuse him because I love you."

"Love me—*at last*, Brighty?"

"Yes, I love you *at last*, my dearest and best friend. Hearts are not won in *a day*—bless me," and Brighty turned and dropped her head upon his bosom. He folded her in his arms, murmuring—

"My boon, my blessing, my comfort! I *do* bless—*I bless thee.*"

Having been duly apprized of the intended marriage, Mr. Frobisher set out for Washington the next day.

A month had now passed away, during which no intercourse was held between Mont Crystal and The Isle of Rays. The separation of the families was as complete as though the Atlantic had frozen up between them. Louise, timid, docile, pliable, and ever under the influence of those nearest to her, made no effort to rejoin her mother, or to reconcile the families. Louis continually cheered her with the hope that this estrangement would pass away—that all would be genial again. On the next Sabbath-day, after morning-service, a quiet, respectable wedding-party filed out of the Stuart-Gordon pew, and arranged itself before the altar. It consisted of General Stuart-Gordon, attended by *Brutus Lion, and Miss* Britannia *O'Riley, attended by Gertrude,* and in ten minutes from the opening of the prayer-book at the marriage ceremony, General and Mrs. Stuart-Gordon received the congratulations of their friends. A travelling carriage, with two outriders, was at the church-door. On leaving the church, General Stuart-Gordon handed his bride into the carriage, where Louis and Louise were already seated, and the whole party set out on a bridal tour to Niagara and the Lakes.

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CHAPTER V.

THE LAIR.

The mountains! the mountains! amidst them is my home,
To their pure and sparkling fountains exultingly I come;
Where bleak and towering summits invade the dark blue sky,
And o'er their rudest ridges upon my steed I fly.
Dickson.

THE Monday succeeding the marriage of Britannia and the General was a glorious day. The sun rose in cloudless splendor, gilding the summits of the Alleghanies and throwing their shadows broad and black upon the valleys. And all this sublime beauty of earth and sky was reflected and duplicated in the diamond-clear waters.

The songs of myriads of birds mingled with the laugh of a thousand rivulets and the shouts of many cataracts. And all this grand harmony was repeated and re-echoed from cavern, rock, and glen.

It was a glorious, jubilant morning.

Above all this thunder of music was sometimes heard a clear, strong, ringing note. It was the passing shout of Gertrude Lion, as she cleared an awful chasm, or gained a lofty peak.

The passage of the Mad River through a defile of the Alleghanies is one of the most sublime and terrific scenes in nature. Upon this all-glorious morning the travelling carriage of young Frobisher wound slowly up the ascent of this most fearful pass. The young man had left The Isle of Rays on Saturday—had reached the hamlet of the Peaks, from whence he had set out upon this morning, with the intention of continuing his journey. He had left the village of the Peaks some miles behind, when his horses began to struggle up this steep, rugged, and perilous ascent. Frobisher looked out upon this wild scene with all an artist's enthusiasm, thoughtless of danger.

Here the rocks seemed to have yawned apart to admit the passage of the river, or rather, to have started apart, aghast at the frenzy of the torrent that tore a passage through their crags, and hurried, howling, leaping, and rebounding, into the abyss far below.

More and more difficult and dangerous became the ascent of this pass, until, having gained the summit, they began to descend.

Suddenly, piercing the thunder of the cataracts, came a cry—

"STOP, ON YOUR LIVES! You have missed the road."

The young man put his head from the carriage-window, and caught a glimpse, high upon the precipice across the torrent, of a golden-haired Amazon in a blue riding-dress, upon a gigantic white horse.

"STOP ON YOUR LIVES! DEATH IS BEFORE YOU!" she shouted again, with frantic gestures. It was too late! With rapidly accelerating velocity the carriage, rolling, pitching, and rebounding, thundered down the precipice, and was dashed to atoms on the rocks of the abyss!

Clearing the chasm by a flying bound, Gertrude Lion sprang from her horse, and, leaping from peak to peak, precipitated herself down to the scene of death below.

With scowling precipices above, and overhanging cliffs around, and jagged rocks below, pitch dark was the cavernous abyss but for one strong gleam of sunlight, that, striking through a cleft in the rocks, fell red upon the ghastly wreck, a mingled heap of broken shafts and wheels, crushed and writhing horses, and dead and dying men!

One instant, aghast with horror, Gertrude stood, then she sprang to the spot. The horses were convulsed in their last death-throes. The coachman lay with his form shattered out of every resemblance to humanity. She saw all this at a glance. A second look showed her the form of a young man, with his head, shoulders, and arms, drooping backwards over the broken windows of the carriage. He hung there, pallid, still, and rigid. This might be from a concussion, or a swoon—there was no proof of death at least. She saw that, and hastened to render assistance where alone it could be available, if any, to him. She took hold of his shoulders and tried to draw him out of the carriage. Finding that a part of the timbers had been crushed upon his form, she let him go, and went to work with her strong hands and hunting-knife until she had cut, torn, and wrenched an opening large enough to draw him through. She took him in her powerful arms, and laid his helpless head over her robust shoulders, and her fine, fierce eyes rolled from precipice to peak, and from rock to torrent, in search of a dry, smooth spot on which to lay the mangled form. She saw nothing of the sort until her eyes fell upon the spot near her feet, where the coachman lay in a heap with the horses—all still in death.

She laid her burden gently down, and with a "Poor fellows!" bestowed impartially upon man and horses, she stooped, and, with her great strength, succeeded in stretching them out, and arranging them into a sort of bed, to keep the bruised form of the living invalid from the sharp rocks and foaming water. Then she lifted her patient, and laid him on the heap, arranging him as tenderly as possible—a wounded and insensible man, resting on a couch formed of the dead!

Seizing a crushed hat from the ground, she stooped to the water, and dipped it full. Kneeling on the sharp rocks, unmindful of the pain, she laved his head and face, the while gazing with a savage admiration at the pale, aristocratic features, surrounded by their frame of black silky hair and whiskers.

"How beautiful he is! how beautiful!" she said, lifting the delicate hand, and examining with a half savage, half childish curiosity the white and tapering fingers, one of which was encircled with a rich seal ring. "Beautiful as a sun-gilded cloud! beautiful as a mountain rainbow! Oh! I hope he will not die." And she renewed her efforts to recover him. "What shall I do? Oh! what shall I do? What *do* people do for dead people? I mean drowned people—no, *killed* people? Oh! they bleed them. The doctor bled Brutus when he was thrown from his horse, and had his head broken—stop"—she took her hunting-knife, and felt its point—then flying to a rock, she sharpened it—then running back to her patient, she ripped up his coat sleeve, and bared his arm, encircling it with her thumb and finger, and compressing it, she started up the vein. Then gazing on the fair transparent skin, with the blue veins meandering beneath, she paused. For the very first time in her life the rock of her heart was smitten, and a fount of pity and tenderness gushed forth into a flood of tears, that rolled flashing down her face, like one of the sparkling waterfalls of her native mountains.

"Oh! what shall I do? I cannot! No, I cannot stick this ghastly blade into that fair arm. Oh! I cannot! it would give him so much pain. But if I do not he will die. Yes, he will dissolve away from me, beautiful and evanescent as the rainbow of this morning."

She opened the vein, and, as the blood began to flow, the young man slowly unclosed his eyes.

"How do you feel? Do you know *me?* (Yes, *that* was what the doctor said to Brutus, when *he* opened his eyes after the bleeding.) How do you feel? Do you know me?"

But a spasm convulsed the young man's face, and he fainted again.

"Oh! Heavens! what shall I do *now?*" exclaimed Gertrude, as she cut off the linen sleeve of his shirt, stripped it up, and bound up his arm. "I must get him home to The Lair; but oh! I am fearful that he cannot bear the removal."

She dashed water in his face. He revived again.

"Do you know me *now?*" she asked, fixing her eyes earnestly on his countenance. He looked at her with a troubled expression, and closed his eyes, as if in weariness, while spasms of pain traversed his countenance.

"Oh! if I could get a doctor here! but that is impossible—neither man nor beast but myself, or some poor, hunted, desperate fugitive slave, could reach this frightful wild. I must try to get him home to The Lair." She attempted to raise him, but spasms of agony convulsed his whole frame on being moved. "Oh! I could carry him home, but the removal would kill him. What shall I do with him? Let's see—these rocks are full of caverns, the occasional retreats of runaway slaves. I must find one, as a temporary shelter."

And laying the wounded man down gently, she started off, diligently searching among the rocks. At last she came to the opening of a cavern. Entering it, she saw that it was smooth, though not level, and quite dark. Stripping off her blue cloth pelisse, she laid it down as a pallet; returning to the side of her invalid, she gently drew him away from the body of the coachman, stripped the clothes from the dead man, and carrying them off to the cavern, laid a part of them on the pelisse, to make it softer, and rolled up a part of them as a pillow, and placed it at the head. Then returning to her patient, she raised him in her arms, laid his head gently over her shoulder, and bore him carefully along till she reached the cavern. Here she laid him down tenderly, and going to a waterfall close by, she filled *the hat, and returning,* made him drink --*tion. and bathed his face,* head, and hands with the rest. Suddenly a noise in the darkest recesses of the cavern startled her. Thinking of a wolf, she drew her hunting-knife, and stood upon her defence. The animal came out from his lair, and stood before her, amazed, as one startled from sleep—a wild, haggard, half-famished fugitive slave, in tattered garments. Gertrude stood on her defence with the raised knife. The man glared at her, a very wolf of desperation and ferocity. He seemed to measure her size and strength, and then made a step towards her.

"Stand!" shouted the Amazon; and the man stood, arrested as by a shock. "Advance another step, and this knife is sheathed in your heart, and you are hurled to the bottom of these precipices. I am Gertrude Lion, and you know me. But pause, and listen, and I may do you good."

The haggard and wolfish features of the slave relaxed a little, as he said, in a hoarse voice—

"And you'll not set the constables on me, Miss Gertrude?"

"Explode the constables! no, I'd do you good, I said. Listen; I know you, Antony, you are Mrs. Armstrong's fugitive slave. Now, I don't adore Mrs. Armstrong myself, and if you will do me a favor, I will assist your escape from the State."

"What is it, then, Miss Gertrude?"

"You see this wounded boy? He was half killed by the breaking of his carriage; he is too ill to be removed; watch by him here, bathe his face and hands, and keep up his strength by pouring water down his throat, while I return to The Lair to fetch necessaries for him."

"But if you should bring a posse with you to take me, Miss Gertrude."

"Why should I? Besides, would any venture their neck in this terrible descent?"

"That is true enough."

"And *I* am true."

"And so you are, Miss Gertrude."

"Certainly; reassure yourself; and here, take my knife. Now nurse your patient tenderly, while I am gone, and when I return, I will not forget you; I will bring you food, clothing, and a pass that will enable you to leave the State."

Then kneeling, and placing her hand once more upon the pallid brow of her patient, and arranging his rude couch, she arose and hurried from the cavern, clambered up the rugged ascent, and sprang from peak to peak, until she had gained the spot where she had left her horse. He was no longer there. Placing her fingers to her lips, she blew a clear, shrill call, and soon her white horse came ambling up the side of the precipice towards her. She placed her hand upon his neck, leaped into the saddle, and sped like an arrow from the bow towards The Lair.

It was late in the morning before she returned, with linen, wine, and food. She found Antony faithfully watching his patient. With the aid of the restoratives she had brought, the young man revived.

"Now, Antony," she said, "we must move him; but first, here is the pass I wrote for you."

She took it out and read it—

"Antony Burgess has my permission to again pass and re-pass from Peakville to Alexandria, free of molestation, between the first of June and the first of July inclusive.

"Gertrude Lion.

"*The Lair,* —— *Co., Va.*"

"There, Antony, that is exactly the pass that I give to my own men when they want to go to town. Now, it is true that you are not my own man, but that is no reason why I should not give you *my* consent to go where you please, since I have no objection to it; and so, when you present that, people will naturally think it comes from your owner. And even if it fails, it cannot get you or me into trouble, since I only express *my consent.* Now, Antony, since they cannot be removed from this abyss, first inter that poor dead coachman, then take his clothes, dress yourself, take this food and wine, and this purse, and God bless you."

"Shan't I help you to tote the young gentleman up the rocks, Miss Gertrude?"

"Oh, no; two carrying one burden could not climb the ascent, you know."

"Sure enough, Miss; but can't I tote him myself?"

"No, no—you could not do it tenderly enough; besides, I doubt whether you are now strong enough. No, do you attend to what is left behind; bury the poor dead coachman, and don't forget to recite the ten commandments over the grave. Now, good-by." And shaking hands with him, Gertrude turned and lifted up her patient.

"No, no—do not; you cannot," muttered the young man, in a feeble voice—now seeming, *for the first time,* to note what was going on.

"*Hush,*" replied Gertrude, laying his head tenderly over her shoulder, while she let his arm rest upon his bosom, and drooped her own head, unconsciously, caressingly, over his silky curls.

She left the cavern, and carefully picking her way among the rocks, not to jolt her patient, began to climb the ascent, with unusual difficulty.

"Oh, do not, do not; you will hurt yourself," very faintly murmured the young man, feebly struggling to get down.

"Hush, hush—there, there, be still—that's a dear boy; be easy—that's a good boy."

He *was* still, from exhaustion, until they had nearly reached the ascent, when the youth again grew restive.

"Come, come, lie still; be quiet, or I'll get mad, and I am dangerous when I'm mad; ask any one if I'm not," said Gertrude, as, resting a moment with her burden, she raised her fingers to her lips, and blew the shrill, clear call, that brought her white horse bounding towards her. Laying the youth on the horse's neck, and holding him there by one hand, she sprang into the saddle, and, gathering him to her bosom again, she set off in a slow and easy gait to The Lair.

Going down the opposite descent of this ridge, and passing through a defile, and climbing up another ridge of rocks, and passing down it, a tall and thickly-wooded mountain cleft, open near the summit, like the open crater of an extinguished volcano, stood before them. The opening near this mountain-top was shaped like a mammoth tea-cup with a piece broken out of its side, the break being in front; or, as I said, like the partly caved-in crater of a burnt-out volcano. This crater was thickly and richly grown with copse-wood, and might indeed have served as the lair of some fabulous giant. In the midst of this lofty green hollow, lurked a shy, half-ruined, old building of red sandstone, looking like a wild beast in his hole, gloomy enough to growl at you. Up this mountain, and towards this house, scrambling over rocks, broken walls, and through tangled bushes and briers, Gertrude bore her charge.

"*What—the—blazes—*are you doing, Gertrude?" exclaimed Brutus Lion, entering the stone-paved kitchen of The Lair that evening. The Gerfalcon had swooped down before the great fireplace, and hovered there before a bright blaze that cast her shadow to the ceiling.

"What the devil are you doing, Gertrude?" again he asked, thrusting his hands into his breeches pockets, and poking his head forward.

Gertrude started to her feet like a guilty thing, a saucepan in one hand and a spoon in the other, her sanguine blood crimsoning her brow.

"Ha, ha, ha, ha, ha-a-a-r!" shouted Brutus. "WHAT! *you* cooking; *you!* *You* a 'coffee-brewing, cake-baking little fool?'"

"HUSH!" muttered the giantess, in a deep, strong tone.

"'Hush?' why, what in thunder am I to hush for?"

"Be still, I say, or, please the loving Lord, I'll gag you, Brutus!" exclaimed the Amazon, setting down the saucepan, and stepping towards him.

"Hum! 'I'll roar you softly an' it were a sucking dove;' but what's it all about, that these stone walls, that usually resound with noise, must now be silent as the 'cushat's downy rest?'"

"The doctor says he must be kept quiet."

"*What* doctor?—*who* kept quiet?"

"The poor boy—the beautiful boy up stairs."

"Boy up stairs!"

"Yes, that was killed almost by having his carriage dashed to pieces."

"Where—when—how?"

"This morning, at Mad River Pass, by taking the wrong road down the precipice.

"And he has been brought here?"

"Yes; and the doctor has been here, and prescribed rest, and bandages, and salves, for his bruises—and wheys, and custards, and jellies, and what not, that I know nothing about. See, I've scalded myself already, trying to make this wine whey. Won't you be so good as to go over to the Dovecote, and fetch Zoe, and the schoolmaster, too, if he cannot be left behind; she knows how all these things ought to be got up."

"Oh, the little 'coffee-brewing fool' can be made useful in a case of emergency."

Very glad of any commission that would bring him in company with Zoe, who, by her father's command, had shunned him entirely for the last two months, Brutus threw himself upon his horse, rode rapidly down the mountain side, and entered the glen at the bottom of which the Dovecote lay. Winding down the circuitous path, he came in front of the cottage, as it rested against the back rocks. Throwing himself from his horse, he opened the little wicker *gate, and here a sad sight* met his view.

The flowers in the garden had all been plucked, and many of them torn up by the roots, and lay in bunches and piles around. The cottage windows were bare of blinds, and he saw through the open door that the pretty carpet was gone from the floor. On one side of the house stood Zoe, clasping two white Bantam chickens to her bosom, and tears were rolling down her cheeks. Zoe looked pale and wasted, and seemed to have passed through a spell of illness since he saw her last. Near her stood the old schoolmaster, bent nearly double with age, infirmity, or sorrow. Twenty years seemed to have passed over his hoary head since Brutus had last met him. He was feebly trying to tie the legs of chickens that he dropped into a hamper at his feet, already half full of poultry. He turned tremblingly around, as he saw Brutus, and asked, in a querulous tone—

"What do *you* come here for, sir? Didn't I tell you to keep away from here? that I wouldn't *have* you here? It is very strange that you will persist in coming where you are not wanted."

"Oh, Brutus!" wept Zoe, coming close to his side, "he has lost his mind—he who was so generous! he thinks of nothing but money. He has carried to town-market all my things, and sold them—my new carpets and quilts—my new socks and gloves—my herbs and flowers. Well, I was sorry, but I did not cry for them, because they were *dead* things; but now, oh, now, he is tying my poor dear hens and chickens to take them to market to-morrow! Look—see! Poor dear Speckle, and—and—sweet darling Blossom—and—and—and now he wants to take lovely Snowdrop—and—" here choking sobs convulsed the child's bosom, as she hugged her white Bantams closer to her bosom.

"What are you sobbing for, you miserable little wretch? Save your tears—you'll have a use for them. Hand me the chickens here; and if you weep, weep for yourself. I must, *must* make up two hundred dollars, and I have not got fifty yet;" and the old man held out his trembling and claw-like fingers for the Bantams.

"Give them up, Zoe, my darling; I will save them—save them all; not a feather of your pets shall be ruffled."

After having showered tears and kisses upon them, Zoe handed the Bantams to the old man.

"Say, sir," exclaimed Brutus, touching the old man's elbow to arrest his attention, for the schoolmaster in his occupation had apparently forgotten him; "say, sir!"

"Well, you here yet? Didn't I tell you to go?"

"We have got a sick young man up to our house, and the doctor has ordered him to eat chickens. I want to buy a dozen."

"Eh? yes! well! what? these are good chickens, and must bring a good price; and since it is for a sick man, and since he is obliged to take them—say a dollar a pair."

"Oh, father!" exclaimed Zoe—

"Never mind—never mind—Zoe, dear, I'm no Jew. That is it, sir! I'll take as many as you will let me have at that price."

"Take them all."

"Agreed. Well, my good sir, there is another thing—the doctor, besides ordering this rich young man to eat chickens, has ordered him to divert his mind by learning Greek lessons."

"Eh! well?"

"And we want to engage a teacher for him in the house."

"Eh! well, yes, what then?"

"We were thinking of *you*, sir."

"Ah, yes, to be sure. But then as it is to save his *life*—it is valuable, and must be liberally compensated, this private tuition."

"Certainly, sir; he is a wealthy Englishman, and can afford it; in the time of his illness, I am his banker, and I can secure it to you," said Brutus, burdening his conscience with lie after lie.

"Zoe, go pack up Herodotus, Æschylus, Euripides, and Sophocles; go. When is it that you want me to come, sir?"

"To-night, sir, to be ready to commence in the morning."

"Well, well. Yes, but what am I to do with Zoe?"

"Sir, my sister, you know is a wild girl; she does not know how to prepare delicate dishes for an invalid, and all our negro women have run away, and so my sister told me to entreat her friend Zoe to come to The Lair, and give her some directions in these matters."

"Yes, but Zoe ought to be paid. No, she shall not, either; I can't degrade Zoe." And the old man burst into tears.

"Oh, what a wreck!" muttered Brutus, looking down on the gray head, bowed upon the withered hands.

At last he looked up imploringly to the *young man's* face, and said—

"Brutus, I want to sell the Dovecote; how *much will you give me for it?"*

"But I do not want to buy it, sir."

"You *don't?* Come, I will sell it to you cheap. I must have money for Zoe's sake."

"For Zoe's sake, sir? I love Zoe; I wish to marry Zoe; I will devote my life to her happiness; consent to our marriage, and her future is secured."

"Brutus, you love her."

"God knows it!"

"*Only* her?"

"Only her, of all womankind."

"Brutus, you cannot marry her."

"You have said so before, but that does not prove it."

"Brutus, swear that you will not divulge what I tell you."

"I swear it, sir."

"ZOE IS A SLAVE!"

Brutus Lion reeled as if struck by a cannon-ball.

"Great God, sir!"

"And there are some in this neighborhood that know it."

"Sir! sir! how did this come to your knowledge?"

"Two months ago, through an old midwife; yesterday, through Mrs. Armstrong."

"Through Mrs. Armstrong!"

"Yes, yes; she sent for me, and told me, advising me to get the child out of the State; but lord, poor baby, where can I send her, alone and unprotected?"

"And who is the owner?"

"Major Somerville."

"And who are her parents?"

"His slaves, Harriet and George."

"Impossible!"

"TRUE, I tell you."

"But the particulars! for God's sake give me the particulars!"

"Well, then, this is it: You remember after my Greek class?"

"Yes."

"How I came home one evening, and found no one here but you, with Zoe?"

"Yes, yes! And I remember your agitation!"

"Well I might be agitated—"

"Well! well!"

"I had been dining with Major Somerville, and sat with him smoking our pipes until the sun got low—*very* low. Then I happened to think of my Greek class, and I started to come home. I paced down the steep of The Crags, and turned into the deep dell that lies between my old school-house hill and the river. At the bottom of this glen the woods are very thick, the trees very tall, and their branches meeting overhead, together with the very high hills around and behind them, throw the path into deep shadow, like night at noon. Well, I had reached the middle of the glen when I overtook old Nancy Jumper, the midwife."

"Kate Jumper's white aunt!"

"*Yes*—well! She was riding slowly along on her mule. Oh! she's an ugly horror, more hideous, than her niece Kate—"

"Yes! well?"

"The path was so narrow that I could not pass her. She turned at the sound of my horse's feet, and said, 'Good evening, master.' 'Good evening, Nancy,' I replied. 'How is Zoe, master?' 'My daughter is well,' I answered, not liking her familiarity; and a silence ensued. Still we had to keep company on the road. At last, without turning her head, she asked, 'What day is this, master?' 'The fifteenth of April.' 'I thought so! This reminds me of this day seventeen years ago.' 'Why?' inquired I with some interest, remembering her calling, and knowing that it was the fifteenth of April, seventeen years ago, that Zoe was found on my porch. 'Because,' she replied, 'something strange happened to me in this glen, upon that very night.' 'What was it, then?' I asked.

"Now, my son Brutus, I will give you the story in her own words:—

"'Well, master, that Friday, the first of April, airly in the morning, I had been called upon to wait on a lady up in Rappahannock county. It was a mortal bad case—one of the worst of cases, and kept me there till near midnight, afore all was over. I would a' staid all night, but it was like for rain, and I memorized that my bedroom windows was left open. So when I had seen the lady and the child comfortable, I sets off for home, atween eleven and twelve o'clock. I wan't afeard, for I never memorize seeing nothink more worser than myself.' 'Likely not,' said I. 'No, sir; much as I have been called up at all hours of the night to travel through the most lonesomest places, I never seen nothink more worser than myself—so I wan't afeard. So me and Jinny—not this Jinny I'm a riding of now, but her mother—so Jinny and me come along slow like, down this deep, narrow path, where you see it is dark enough in the daytime, but in a cloudy midnight it is the most darkest place as ever was hern tell on! Well, Jinny and me, we was a coming through this black hollow, when we got into the midst of the blackness, Jinny *she started, driv' her feet plump* into the ground, and stood stock still! I seen nothink in the dark, and sure as I'm a livin' sinner, master, I thought Jinny seen a sperrit! Now, I ain't afeard of nothink in the brute form, nor yet in the human form, but I must say as how I'm afeard o' sperrits, specially *black* ones. I bursted all over in perspiration, just as if I had been drinking of a sweat, and I said, 'In the name *off* the angels, and *off* the saints, and *off* the devils, what *do* you want?' 'Are you Granny Jumper?' says a gruff voice, says *it*. Says I, 'Yes.' 'Well, you're wanted to go to a lady. I have been at your house to look for you, and come from there to meet you, as the gal said you'd be sure to be coming home.' Then he—it was a *he*—comes up close to me and says, says he, 'Granny, this is a secret business.' 'I'm used to sich,' says I. 'A young lady who has been privately married—' 'Without being beholden to the parson,' says I. 'You are at fault; but this must be kept a secret, and you shall be paid well,' says he. 'But, Granny,' says he, 'you must be blindfolded.' 'I won't,' said I. 'Granny, do you know a guinea when you feel it?' 'Yes,' says I. 'Here are two. Suffer me to blindfold you and you shall have five more when the affair is over.' 'Well,' thinks I, 'the blessed fool may blindfold me, but it will go hard if I don't know the road he's a takin' of me.' So I let the man blindfold me, and then he led my mule down that path, and made a circle to fool me, and took me by another path straight up The Crags. I kept the general route well enough. Then we stops—dogs barks—he speaks to them, and they hushes. Then he helps me down, and takes my arm, and draws it through hisen. Well, when I was so close to him, I knows he was not one of my own color; still I never let on. He takes me through a door, and through a room, and through another door, and up a flight of stairs on the left hand, and into a room on the right. Here he took the bandage from my eyes, and he might's well have left it on. The room was rayther darkish. He led me up to a bed as was curtained. Well, there was no light brought into the room until jist after the babe was born, and even *then* I did not see the mother's face, for she concealed it. The woman that brought the light in had her face muffled up in a shawl, and she took the babe and carried it out, with the light also. And then, in the dark, came the same man, and blindfolding me, put five guineas in my hand, and took me away. Well, he took me by still another road, and left me in the middle of the same glen where he had stopped me. Well, it was very nigh on to dawn when I got home. I was younger and stronger then than I am now, and more usen to lose my rest; so, instead of going to bed at the dawn of day, I makes myself a strong cup of coffee, and goes across the river to pick horse-mint afore the dew was off. You know there's nothink like that grows on this barren side. Well, the sun wasn't nothink nigh up when I passes close to the Dovecote. I seen a woman going towards it with a somethink in her arms. The woman didn't see me. I stoops down where I was a gathering of the horse-mint, and watches her. She lays down her bundle on the porch, and, as she turned around to come away, I seen it was Harriet, Major Somerville's quadroon 'ooman. She looked ill and ghastly, and I know'd how it was her *own* child she had laid there. And I guessed her motive. I know'd how she and her ole man had been a tryin' to save money to buy the freedom of their first child, Anna, and I memorize of hearing her say that she never would bring another child into the world to be a slave, and I knew that she had concealed the birth of this child, and laid it at your door, that it might be fotch up as a free white child'

"'Did you speak to Harriet when she turned from my cottage-gate?'

"'No, master.'

"'Why?'

"'Because I did not wish to let on as I know'd any think about it.'

"'Again—why?'

"'La, master, keeping of things to myself comes sort o' nat'rel to me.'

"'Why, then, do you tell me now?'

"'Why, master, you see for a reason. I am getting old, and a losing of my custom, and a wantin' of money, and it come to me as if I let on any think about the girl to old Major Somerville's creditors, how they might pay me some'at smart for tellin' all about it; some'at to keep me in my old days—but I thought how I wouldn't like to 'sturb you, as you like the little gal, if you could manage yourself, to make me up a little something to keep me in my old days.'

"In a word, Brutus, the old crone wished to extort money from me."

"I hope you did not pay her to keep the secret, sir?"

"I *could* not, Brutus. I did not even give her the least encouragement to hope that I would."

"*I am glad of it, sir.* This whole story *sounds to me very much* like an imposition."

"But it is not."

"Not, sir?"

"NOT! Listen, Brutus. Within a week, the old woman has divulged the secret."

"How, sir?"

"Yes, to Major Somerville's largest creditor!"

"Oh, Heaven!"

"Yesterday morning, Mrs. Armstrong sent for me. I went to her; she was in her bedroom, looking very ill, propped up with pillows in her easy chair. She has changed very much since her last visit to The Isle of Rays. 'I have sent for you, sir,' she said, 'upon the most important business—your adopted daughter, Zoe, sir. Are you advised of her origin?' I could not reply. I grew giddy, and turned pale, and she saw it. 'Sit down, sir,' she said —(she had not invited me to do so before.) 'I see, sir, that you know or suspect something of this girl's birth. May I inquire how long it has been since you have known or suspected this?' 'Madam, I *know* nothing.'

"'Very well, sir! I do not insist upon your committing yourself by rash words; but let me tell you, sir, that *I* know all; and that I have sent for you from the kindest motives, to advise you to send this girl away from the State. She is the second daughter of George and Harriet, two slaves of Major Somerville. They dishonestly concealed her birth, to secure her education and freedom. This secret cannot be kept for ever. I have lately learned it, as others will. The creditors of Major Somerville are growing impatient. They will not molest him now—but he is in extreme age. If any thing were to *happen* to him, they would swoop down upon his property, and sweep it all away; and though, as Major Somerville's largest creditor, my claims are just, and *I* promise to forego them, yet *others* will not, or cannot afford to be so merciful. Therefore, I advise you to get your *protégé* out of the State, with all possible expedition. It is a pity that a young girl, so nearly white as to *pass* for white, and with a mind and heart so rich and so highly cultivated, should be reduced to slavery.' And, ringing the bell for her servant, Mrs. Armstrong dismissed me.

"Well, Brutus, what do you think of this story?"

"Sir, I am confused—amazed; but I think that when the devil or Mrs. Armstrong grows philanthropic, something is to be suspected, and people should be on their guard," moaned Brutus, in a tone of deep sorrow."

"And I, Brutus. My brain reels, sometimes, my memory fails. I am unable to fix my attention upon any thing. This child, Brutus! I loved her as my own!"

"Ah, sir!" heavily sighed Brutus.

"You do not know all she was to me!"

"Oh, sir! yes, I do."

"She was the life of my heart."

"Oh! Heaven, sir! of *mine* too!"

"*I called her Zoe—life!*"

"God have mercy on us!"

"I taught her GREEK!"

"God have mercy on us!" again prayed Brutus, passionately clasping his hands.

"Brutus!"

"Sir!"

"You can never marry her."

"Oh! I know it," groaned the young man.

"Therefore, Brutus, there must be no more love passages between you."

"Oh! no, no, sir," sighed the Lion, dropping his shaggy head upon his hands.

"If I take her to The Lair, where indeed she will be safer, in some respects, you will regard her misfortunes."

"Yes, sir, oh yes! But tell me—does she—no, she does not—this unfortunate child—suspect her real position?"

"Ah, no! I have not had the courage to tell her yet—"

At this moment the coming up of Zoe arrested their conversation.

By nightfall they were all at The Lair. The old man, as is frequently the case with the extremely aged, had, after this spasmodic clearing up of his intellects, relapsed into the confused, abstracted condition of mind that had of late marked him.

Immediately on reaching The Lair, Brutus had a fire lighted in a musty old study, filled with mouldy books, and conducting the schoolmaster there, told him that that opened into a sleeping-room, and that they were to be his apartments. Here, seated at a wood fire, the old man fell into a reverie, forgetting even to inquire about his pupil.

In the old stone-kitchen below, little Zoe busied herself in making a whey for the patient, while Brutus walked moodily up and down the floor. Gertrude remained at the bedside of her invalid. She did not even join the schoolmaster, Brutus, and Zoe, at supper; but after supper; she came down, and sent Zoe up to watch, while she took some refreshments. The schoolmaster had retired again to the musty study. Gertrude took a seat near the window, and while she ate some strawberries, she talked to Brutus.

"How is your patient, Gertrude?" he asked.

"Feverish, restless, tumbling about his bed, and worrying himself to death about some State papers that *must* be returned to Washington."

"Where are they now?"

"In his coat pocket."

"Send them to the post-office."

"He will not trust them to our uncertain country mails; besides he knows that this is not mail-day, and it is of the utmost importance that these papers be in the Minister's hands the day after to-morrow. Unless his mind can be set at rest upon this subject, he will be excited into high fever, perhaps delirium. The physician, who left him just as you returned, says so. I was about to ask you, Brutus, if you could not possibly go to Washington with these papers. Earthquake will take you there and back in two days. Oh! Brutus, you would so much oblige me if you would, and it might be the saving of the young man's life."

Brutus mused—Gertrude coaxed. It seemed not unpleasant to Brutus to get away, if possible, from torturing regrets. Nothing could happen, or at least was likely to happen, to Zoe, in so short a space as two days.

"Brutus, I never asked a favor of you before in my life, and I beg one of you now."

"I will go, Gertrude."

Indeed, both brother and sister were wonderfully subdued and softened—the one by pity—the other by sorrow—both by love.

In order to lose no time, Brutus arose before dawn and called Gertrude, who had watched by the wounded man's couch all night. Taking Gertrude down into the dark and silent hall, he there related to her the secret history revealed by the schoolmaster, at which Gertrude expressed no surprise at all; on the contrary, she replied—

"I suspected it all along."

"You *did*, Gertrude. But from what circumstances?"

"I can scarcely tell you. From the vaguest things, that yet impressed me strongly; things so intangible that they would vanish when I would try and seize and prove them. And, moreover, *what I feel most certainly, is, that Mrs. Armstrong is darkly, and perhaps criminally, implicated in this same business.*"

"Your reasons? Your reasons?"

"I cannot give any that you would not set down as fanciful and absurd. If I were to tell you, for instance, only of certain looks, tones, and gestures, upon certain occasions—starts and pallors, upon the naming of certain subjects—you would consider them fantastical, as I do when I really examine them; yet I feel in my inmost heart that Mrs. Armstrong is criminally implicated in this affair. For, sometimes, by little hints capable of a double meaning, I frighten her into the idea that I know something, when I know nothing." Brutus groaned deeply, and then said—

"Gertrude, old Major Somerville has been threatened with an apoplectic stroke. It is scarcely likely that any thing should happen before my return; but if it should chance that the old man is stricken down—his creditors only wait his death, to swoop down upon his property—in a word, Gertrude, if the sheriff should attach Zoe as his property, you will defend her?"

"With my life. Come, you know me."

"You will not permit the constable to take her?"

"Take her, Glory! We shall take the constables. I snuff the battle afar off!"

CHAPTER VI.

DEATH AT THE CRAGS.

No—pleasures, hopes, affections gone
The wretch may bear and yet live on,
Like things within the cold rock found,
Alive, when all 's congeal'd around.
But there 's a blank repose in this,
A calm stagnation that were bliss,
To the keen, burning, harrowing pain,
Now felt through all that breast and brain.
Moore.

"Why is this? Why do I walk about in a conscious death, dead—seeming to live. Dead! yes, were the grave closed over me, I could not be more completely dead. And it would be better so, for then I should not be conscious as I am now. Death in the grave! why, that is not bad. The unconscious body lies there, and the freed spirit revels in liberty and space. Death in the grave! *that* were a boon. But it is this *body* that is a sepulchre where my soul lies entombed alive.

"I have no strength of heart to love, believe, or hope—none. How cold and hard I grow. My poor old grandfather, old, sick, and poor, no longer moves my sympathy, because I think it is not such a misfortune to grow old *and die.*

"Anna no longer shares my love. I wonder *at her habitual resignation*, and cannot understand it. A river of ice seems to have frozen between us.

"I cannot pray or believe as once, for hard thoughts of Providence come between my prayer and His throne.

"Yes! my life of love, of hope, and faith is gone. I am dead—dead. Oh! Lord, complete this dissolution; let me die, indeed, or else give me life—*some* life—a life of anguish, rather than this *conscious*, living death!"

Such were the half-crazy moanings of Susan Somerville when she returned home from the marriage of General Stuart-Gordon and Miss O'Riley.

"Give me life or death! *Any* life!—a life of anguish, rather than this conscious death!"

It seemed as if her wild prayer had been heard and answered. Anna entered the room, pale and trembling. Susan turned and looked at her with languid surprise.

"Your grandfather, Miss Susan."

"What of him?"

"In a fit—dying!"

"Oh, God, forgive me, and spare him!" exclaimed the conscience-stricken girl, suddenly thinking remorsefully of her repinings a moment before. She hurried from the room wildly—paused in the hall, and asked hastily, "Where is he?"

"In his room, Miss Susan."

"Have you sent for the doctor?"

"My father has gone, Miss Susan."

"Who is with him?" she inquired, still hurrying on.

"My mother," Miss Susan.

"Who found him?"

"I did, Miss Susan. I went to call him down to dinner, and found him on the floor in a fit."

"On the floor in a fit! Oh, my God! we have neglected him, Anna. Oh, Anna, we have neglected him!"

"I do not think so, Miss Susan."

"He ought never to have been left alone a moment. Oh, Anna, not a moment! Oh, Anna, who knows how long he suffered before you found him!"

"Not five minutes, Miss Susan. He had been reading the Bible all the morning, while you were at church, and until you came home. When he saw you go up to your room to put off your bonnet, he went into the yard and plucked a bunch of wild eglantine roses, and told me to put them in water and set them on the table for you, and to call him to dinner when you came down; and then he went to his room, and in five minutes, or less time, I found him in a fit."

The end of this rapid conversation brought them to the bedside of the invalid. Tears were streaming from the eyes of Susan as she gazed at the convulsed form and features of the old man. Even while she gazed, a violent spasm agitated the poor old frame.

"Oh, *what* can we do for him?" she sobbed. "Grandfather! dear grandfather! can't you speak to us?"

"Hush, Miss Susan! He is past that—long past that."

"Oh! what can we do for him?"

"Nothing, Miss Susan, till the doctor comes. This is apoplexy."

"Apoplexy! Oh, Heaven!"

"Calm yourself, Miss Susan."

"Grandfather! oh, dear grandfather, look at me! just look at me!" sobbed Susan, seeking to fix the glance of the rolling eyes. But there was no consciousness in those orbs. Dropping on her knee by the bedside, she took and kissed, again and again, the old, withered hand that hung helplessly over the quilt, and gave herself up to a passion of sobs. "Grandfather! Oh, I would give the best years of my life for one single word, for one single glance of recognition. This poor hand! its last act was for me. Ingrate! oh, ingrate that I was." Again a violent fit of sobbing choked her utterance. "His last words to me were, 'God love you, baby!' just as we set out for church, and his last words were, 'Put these roses in water for Susan.' Ingrate! oh, ingrate, that I was." A spasm again convulsed the dying man. "Grandfather, oh, grandfather! if I could change places with you, God knows I would do it." A moan from the breast of the old man—a short, rasping respiration—a quick, violent spasm—and all was still.

"He is at rest, Miss Susan," said Harriet. Susan started to her feet—gazed one moment on the stiffening face; a mist passed before her eyes, her head swam, her limbs failed, and she fell. Anna caught her, placed a cup of water to her lips, and drew her from the room—drew her to her own chamber, where Susan fell upon the bed and turned upon her face, extending her arms in an attitude of utter and helpless abandonment. And there she lay all day, and there she lay all night, without a change of position.

Anna returned to the death-chamber to assist her mother. The doctor had just come—ten *minutes too late.*

Major Somerville died on Sunday afternoon.

On Tuesday, at the very hour that Brutus Lion was setting out for the metropolis, without having heard of what had happened at The Crags, ten miles off, they were making preparations for the funeral.

The funeral took place on Tuesday afternoon.

On Wednesday morning, Miss Somerville and Anna were sitting out on the piazza. Both were in mourning. Susan was engaged, mechanically, with her everlasting knotting work. Anna was reading to her from Felicia Hemans' poems. They had been left to Susan by Britannia O'Riley, who bestowed upon her, her whole collection of books, casts, and pictures before leaving The Crags. There were few who read poetry with more appreciation, sympathy, or finer elocution than Anna. She was reading the "Crowning of Corinne at the Capitol," and when she finished—

> "Radiant daughter of the sun!
> Now thy living wreath is won.
> Crowned of Rome! oh, art thou not
> Happier in that glorious lot?—
> Happy, happier far than thou,
> With the laurel on thy brow,
> Is she that makes the humblest hearth,
> Lovely but to *one* on earth!"

"Read on. I like it," said Susan. "There is the wail of a broken heart in every line she has written."

But Anna resolutely closed the book.

"This is unhealthy, Miss Susan, this is morbid in you, in Corinne, and in the poetess whose sweet but enfeebling strains we have just been reading. The heart of this ideal Corinne was destroyed by a conflagration of passion—what then? She had a glorious brain. It was impossible to live in a ruin—what then? She might have lived in a palace. She had no life in her affections—well, she might have had a glorious life in her intellect. The soul lives in the heart and the head—in the affections and in the intellect. A strong soul driven out from its own wounded heart ascends into its brain, and finds a higher if a colder life. It is only in despair, in inaction, that such a spirit suffers long. The stronger the faculties of the soul, the more it suffers in inaction. An idiot will sit all day, and day after day, happy in idleness; an intelligent child will be miserable if confined an hour without employment or amusement. An extremely aged person will sit week after week in the same arm-chair, in the same corner of the same room, pleased and happy; a young person grows weary if a day's rain confines him to the house. A feeble and subdued prisoner will linger out years in his cell in a sort of torpid resignation; a healthy, strong captive struggles and chafes in his fetters. The soul is a sort of prisoner in the body—and the stronger and more healthy it is, the more it chafes and frets, until it finds its life in action—its freedom in action. A young person, full of repressed life, health, and energy—full of strong powers that crave their development—experiences a lassitude, a listlessness, a weariness of life, for which they cannot account, especially when they hear the season of youth spoken of as the season of joy. Such a young person will take to reading or writing sentimental poetry, and grow weaker, more weary, and more useless every day. Now, sentimental poetry has its mission, but it is to soften the *hard*—not to liquefy the already soft. The cure of such brain-sick youth is not in that. Let any young man or woman, tormented by this terrible *ennui*, take my word for it, that the nature of their suffering proves them to possess great powers undeveloped. Let such *seek their vocation, and pursue it.* And this is a sure guide. Let them find out that *useful* occupation in which they take the most pleasure, and then bring all the powers of mind and body to a focus to bear upon *that point*—to break down every obstacle, conquer every difficulty, and press onward to the *end*, however distant, however difficult, however seemingly unattainable—for then at least the powers of the soul will be brought out in all their glorious life, energy, and joy! Every one has his talent, and he will suffer in proportion as he lets it rust in his heart. And this I lay down as a rule, without an exception, that no healthy human being—however young, beautiful, loving, and loved—however intellectual, however wealthy, powerful, honored—that NO HEALTHY HUMAN BEING CAN BE HAPPY WITHOUT LABOR. LABOR IS DESTINY."

"I am knotting," smiled Susan with a sad sarcasm, "yet I do not find in accumulating yards of cotton fringe and piles of toilet covers and valances, any peculiar pleasure; nor am I sensible of any great happiness in counting these meshes."

"That is not labor, Miss Somerville, though it serves to calm your nerves. That is not labor; it goes on mechanically, almost without your consent; your fingers act as your heart beats, as your lungs breathe, involuntarily. *You are strong* and idle, and you want *work. Labor is destiny!*"

"*And how, with your limited* knowledge of the world and of books, have you arrived at that conclusion?"

"One does not need a library, or a tour round the world, Miss Somerville, to work out some things. All human nature is contained in one small village church—I had almost said, in one small child. All books of ethics and philosophy are contained in one pocket Bible. The Bible, a few histories, and a few poems, have been my library, as you know. The party at Mont Crystal was my tour of the world. For the rest, Miss Susan, while you were *loving*, I was *thinking*. I saw scores of young girls and young men at Mont Crystal, all seeming, at first sight, bright and happy; but all in proportion to their strength of soul, deadly weary of the monotonous round of eating, drinking, dressing, and flirting. Yet that was said to have been a very delightful party; the young people were said to have enjoyed themselves heartily. I know better; they tired of it in three days, and only continued it because nothing better offered by which to employ themselves. No—with all other means and appliances, toil is an indispensable requisite to happiness. As I said, every one has his or her appointed work, and is tormented with restlessness until they have found it. What do you take most pleasure in doing, Miss Susan? I know—I have studied you, Miss Susan. You are happiest when working for *others*, without minding what that work may be. Miss Susan, you must seek a position where you can spend your days in the service of others. If I could choose a destiny for you, you should be the wife of some wise, calm, strong, country clergyman, with an extensive field of labor before him. But see, Miss Susan," said she suddenly, "while we are talking, you are missing the effect of this beautiful moving panorama of clouds over the sky and river. The descent from The Crags to the river level is said to be monotonous, because almost destitute of vegetation—but look! it is varied with every form of rock, and every shade of gray. Gold in the sunshine and bronze in the shade! Every little fragment of stone is gold on the one side and bronze on the other. Now, look at the sky and the river; see the gilded clouds sailing through the blue ether, and their shadows moving on the waters! See The Isle of Rays, how it sparkles in the sun!"

"Yet it is a forsaken and empty house."

"Just now, yes; but it beams and scintillates all the same. And now raise your eyes to where Mont Crystal towers on the opposite bank, with its white granite walls and rows of crystal windows glancing in the light."

"Yes, but its cold splendor incloses an aged and solitary woman."

"You find gloom in every thing to-day, Miss Susan."

"Ah! Anna, I cannot help it."

"But look at this picture, that God has hung out before you. See how the sky smiles in blessing on the earth and waters. See how they smile back in love. See how the clouds combine, dissolve, and change, with a misty brightness, an ever-varying radiance. Did ever skies beam with more love—did ever earth smile with more gladness than now? Oh! look and listen, and acknowledge God in his works. The halls of the Island Palace are lined with the rarest works of the greatest masters. Recall that masterpiece of Claude Lorraine, and tell me if it approaches this in value, though *that* cost a thousand guineas, and could only be purchased by a millionaire; and *this* is hung out in the sight of all, for nothing. The soul of the *artist* was in that, but the soul of *God* is in this. The painter expressed himself there—the Creator reveals himself here. How can you be gloomy, while God is smiling on you through the skies?"

Suddenly Anna grew pale—started as she gazed down the flight of rocks—turned, as by an instinctive impulse, to fly—seated herself again as by a second resolution, and gazed steadily out upon the rocks.

"What is the matter, Anna?" inquired Miss Somerville. Anna pointed to where three horsemen were just coming in sight, up the ascent. They approached the house, dismounted, and walked towards Miss Somerville and Anna. Anna grew paler still, trembled—then setting her teeth, and clinching tightly both hands, with a gesture full of strength of soul, she summoned her physical energies to their post.

"Miss Susan Somerville, I presume," said the first man, lifting his hat to the young lady.

"That is my name, sir," replied she, rising to receive them.

"*My* name is Power, deputy sheriff of —— county."

"Will you come in, Mr. Power?" asked Susan, who heard this announcement with surprise, but not fear. *She* was ignorant of any cause she might have to dread the deputy sheriff.

"Thank you, Miss," he replied, and followed Susan to the sitting-room.

"Take a chair, sir."

"No, I am much obliged to you, Miss," he said, setting his hat and whip down on the table, and rummaging in his pockets for a paper.

Susan watched him with increasing perplexity.

"Let me see; how many negroes have you on the place, Miss Somerville?"

"I have no domestics to *hire out*, sir," replied Susan, believing that she had now divined the motive of his visit.

"How many slaves have you about the house, then, Miss Somerville."

"None, sir."

"What! my dear young lady."

"Sir, I have my foster-parents, George and Harriet, who brought me up, and my foster-sister and companion, Anna, who has always shared my room, my table, and my school. They are quadroons. I do not call them slaves."

"They were the slaves of the late Major Somerville, however?"

"Yes, sir."

"And they are yours now."

"No, sir! I do not for a moment acknowledge any right in myself to hold them. My dear grandfather's funeral took place only on *yesterday afternoon*, and *to-morrow morning* I go to Richmond to take measures for their emancipation!" said Miss Somerville, in a cold, severe tone—for *now* she believed herself in conversation with a would-be *purchaser*.

"Will you? Ah! yes, well! A generous and praiseworthy design on your part, my dear young lady," said the deputy sheriff, perceiving for the first time that Susan was entirely unsuspicious of the object of his visit.

"Will you, however, let me *see* these people, my dear Miss Somerville?"

"Oh, he is the *tax-gatherer!*" thought Susan.

"Certainly, sir," she replied; then, turning to Anna, she said, "Anna, will you call your parents?"

Anna, who had conquered herself, and now stood calm, cold, and impassible, went out to obey.

"Is *that* one of them?"

"Yes, sir."

"*That* girl?"

"Yes, sir."

"Why, she is white!"

"Very nearly, sir."

Anna now returned to the room with her parents. Poor George entered from his work-bench, with his white felt hat on his head, and a wisp of fine-cut flag and his working knife in his hand. He pulled off his hat at the door, and stood waiting to be spoken to. Harriet stood by him, with her hand resting on his arm. Anna went and stood by Susan.

"Your name is George, my man?" asked the deputy sheriff, seating himself at a table, and taking out a pocket apparatus for writing.

"Yes, sir."

"Your age?" asked the sheriff, beginning to write.

"Sixty years, sir," replied George.

"And your wife's name is Harriet?"

"Yes, sir."

"Her age?" he inquired, continuing to make notes.

"Forty-five, sir."

"That young girl is your daughter?"

"Yes, sir," replied the father, the muscles of his face twitching.

"Her name—age?"

"Anna—aged eighteen," answered the poor father, in a broken voice, clutching the old white hat convulsively.

The sheriff now went to the door, and called in the three men who had remained in the piazza. Two of them entered and remained standing near the door. The third accompanied him to the table.

"This is Mr. Jones, the assessor, Miss Somerville," he said, as they passed Susan.

"I thought that *you* were the assessor, sir," said Susan, simply.

"No, Miss," said the deputy, without smiling at her mistake. "Jones," he said, addressing the assessor, "look at that man and tell me how much you think him worth."

"How old is he?"

"Sixty."

"Hum! he looks nearer seventy; but these mulattoes break down very early. He looks very worthless."

"Say one hundred and fifty dollars?"

"Ye-e-e-s—scarcely that—"

"One hundred?"

"Well-ll; ye-e-es!"

"Look at the woman. What is her value?"

"How old is she?"

"Forty-five," she says.

"She looks more like fifty. Put her at—at—Has your wife good health, my man?"

"Yes, sir," sighed George.

"Well! there is some work in her yet. Put her at two hundred dollars."

"Now, then, for the girl; you see what her *personal appearance is*—eighteen years old; well educated, and all that—now, what is her value?"

The assessor looked at Anna; and, as his sensual eyes roved all over her girlish figure, gloating on her beauty, he muttered an exclamation—

"She is a handsome girl, and it would be a good spec' to take her to New Orleans. She'd bring twelve or fifteen hundred dollars!"

"Gentlemen," said Susan Somerville turning towards them, "you will do me a favor by getting this assessment over as quickly as may be. Set your valuation as high as you please. I do not care for a few dollars more or less of *taxation*, but I *do* care to have my privacy invaded and my friends here subjected to this indignity—the last, if it please Heaven, that they shall ever suffer, for to-morrow I will take measures for their immediate emancipation! Pray, gentlemen, be expeditious—will you?"

"A moment, young lady, a moment. At what do you value the wench, Jones?"

The assessor walked towards Anna, still keeping his brutish eyes riveted upon her; and, walking around her as though she had been a horse for sale, he lifted his hand to turn her about.

"DEATH! Hands off my daughter, sir!" exclaimed the hitherto patient George, springing to his child's side.

But, even before he had reached her, the calm-souled dignity of Anna, breathing through every look and attitude, had repulsed him. He returned to the table.

"She would bring fifteen hundred or a thousand dollars in New Orleans."

"That is not the question; what would she bring *here?*"

"Gentlemen, I beg of you"—commenced Susan Somerville.

"Be patient, young lady. What is her value *here*, Jones?"

"Gentlemen, I *insist*"—began Susan again, with her cheeks burning and her eyes flashing, "I *insist* that this is arrested. I *command* you to finish your business and leave us."

"One instant, Miss Somerville. Well, Jones, her value is—"

"Three hundred dollars!"

"My dear Anna, can you forgive me, that this outrage is offered you before my face?"

"You cannot help it, dear Miss Somerville," replied Anna, calmly.

"Have you *done*, gentlemen?" indignantly demanded Miss Somerville, as the deputy and the assessor folded up their papers and returned them to their pockets and proceeded to button up their coats, "*have* you done, gentlemen?"

"Miss Somerville," began the deputy, "I have now to perform a very painful duty; a simple and short one, however."

"Yes, as short as an execution," muttered George.

"Miss Somerville, I attach this property at the suit of Spier & Co., Grocers, Peakville."

Susan started to her feet, clasped her hands, and turned deadly pale, as the truth suddenly struck her.

Anna stood still and white.

George and Harriet threw themselves in each other's arms, with a cry.

"To THE DOORS, Briggs and Brown! look to the doors!" shouted the deputy, whom this action had alarmed, springing to his feet.

The two constables sprang to the doors, securing them.

"Cock your pistols!"

"It is unnecessary, sir; we will make no resistance," said George, gently disengaging the arms of his wife from about his neck.

"Oh, my Saviour, my Saviour, have mercy on us!" cried Susan, wringing her hands.

"Be patient, Miss Susan, dear Miss Susan," said Anna, caressing her.

"Have you the handcuffs, Jones?"

"Yes; here they are."

"Oh, my God, no! you will *never* do that," cried Susan, in anguish.

"My dear young lady, if men were turned by the tears of women, we should never do our duty. Give me the fetters, Jones; here, we will secure the two women together, and then the man by himself."

And the deputy, taking the fetters, went up to the spot where Anna and her mother now stood, locked in each other's arms.

"YOU SHALL NOT DO IT! Away! YOU SHALL NOT DO IT!" shouted George, bounding between his wife and child and the officers, and brandishing his knife—all the latent and terrible ferocity of the MIXED BLOOD leaping, like forked lightning, from his eyes.

"I have been patient; I would have followed you like a whipped hound follows his master; you might have handcuffed me, but not them. See, I am her father; and I will bury this knife in your heart or in hers, sooner than you shall place a fetter on her wrist."

"What! the devil! You d—d mulatto rascal, do you resist an officer of the law?"

"*To THE DEATH! in this case.*"

With no more ado, the deputy suddenly raised the end of the loaded whip and brought it down in a sharp and stunning blow upon the head of the gray-haired slave, who dropped in a heap at his feet.

With a piercing scream, Susan Somerville sprang forward, and fell upon her face in a death-like swoon.

Harriet, pale with terror, clung helplessly to her daughter.

Anna alone was self-possessed.

"Sit down, dear mother, and let me attend to Miss Susan and father; or, mother, try to attend father while I get Miss Susan up stairs." And gently easing her trembling mother down upon a chair, she went to Susan's side, and, lifting her head, and addressing herself to one of the men who had taken no part in this violent scene, beyond guarding the doors, she said—

"Will you be so good as to lift this young lady and bring her up stairs with me?"

The man looked at his superior for permission.

"Yes, take her along," said the deputy; "it's the devil's own business, an affair of this kind, where there are so many women about."

And the officer raised Susan in his arms, and bore her after Anna, who led the way up stairs.

Taking advantage of Susan's swoon, Anna's absence, and George's insensibility, to finish the affair quickly and quietly, the deputy sheriff attached the little old family cart, the old family horse, and harnessing it up, bound George and laid him in the bottom of it; placing Harriet, who willingly accompanied him, by his side. Then, leaving a bailiff in charge, the deputy set off for the county town.

They were a mile from The Crags before Susan Somerville recovered from her swoon. She recovered painfully with spasmodic twitchings—opened her eyes, groaned, shivered, closed them again. Soon reopening them, she looked around, and, seeing Anna, said—

"Anna! Anna! are you there? Oh, Anna, I have had the most dreadful nightmare!" and sighed heavily again, and covered her eyes with her hands, as shudderings convulsed her frame. Then flaring her eyes wide open, she started up in bed, caught both Anna's hands in her own, and gazed long and searchingly in her face. Then groaning, "Oh my God! It was *no dream!* It was true!" fell back and covered her face with her hands. In a few minutes, without uncovering her face, she inquired, "Where are they, Anna?"

"Gone, Miss Susan."

"I mean your mother and father?"

"*Gone!*"

"Oh, my God! And *you*, Anna?"

"I am left here in charge of a bailiff until some other assistance can be sent to you. Perhaps I shall stay all night with you. And now, Miss Susan, *pray* and try to calm your mind, for to-morrow you must do something."

"What is it, Anna? Oh, suggest something that I can do, and never fear but that I shall get better, and grow strong enough instantly to do it. It is the *helplessness* of our situation that makes me despairing and ill."

"Then, Miss Susan, you had better write to General Stuart-Gordon; he will assist us, without doubt. Notice will have to be given a certain number of days before any sale is made, and in that time General Stuart-Gordon can be heard from."

"I will write to-night, Anna."

"No, Miss Susan, you could not hold a pen; to-morrow will be quite time enough."

"Alas! Anna, what has not 'to-morrow' cost us already? It was to-morrow that I was to have gone to Richmond to see about doing you justice! Ah, Anna! if I had gone *to-day*, you and your parents might have been saved!"

"Not so, Miss Susan! We were watched; they would have followed and attached us on the road."

"Ah! if I thought it was inevitable I should not suffer such pangs of remorse; but, oh! I fear it was my delay alone. Yet I never dreamed of an execution."

"It was inevitable, Miss Susan. You could not help it. Try to be composed."

"*You* are so composed, Anna! How is it that you are so composed?"

"Ah, Miss Susan, a misfortune long looked for does not startle one when it arrives."

"You expected this long, then?"

"For more than six months, Miss Somerville."

"Ah! why did you not tell me?"

"You could not have averted it; why torment you with it, then, Miss Susan?"

"Then, when I supposed you to be grieving over your own position, you were only dreading this catastrophe?"

"That was it, Miss Susan."

"Oh, my dear Anna! I have never done *you justice.*"

"*Try to rest,* Miss Susan."

A silence ensued. Anna supposed Miss Somerville to be composing herself to sleep, but presently the low sounds of weeping, under the sheets, stole on her ear. At last—

"Anna, are you there yet?" murmured Susan.

"Yes, Miss Susan."

"Go to bed, Anna! *Do* go to bed. Something *must* be done, if it be in the power of human tears, and prayers, and persuasions. I will humble myself to these men, Anna. Oh! if human hearts can be moved by human misery, you shall be saved, Anna."

"Ah!" thought Anna, "they will have but one answer to your prayers, Miss Susan—'the law!'" but she said, "Yes, hope, Miss Somerville." And feeling that Susan could not grow quiet unless she herself seemed to rest, Anna lifted Susan's hand, pressed and kissed it, and bade her good night. Susan turned on her pillow, seeming to sleep, but really busying herself with a thousand impossible plans for saving her foster-sister, and redeeming George and Harriet.

Anna withdrew to the window to draw the curtain and exclude the moonbeams, that her mistress might sleep more quietly. And she looked out upon the rocks falling down to the river, the river and the banks floating in a flood of silvery radiance, and The Isle of Rays glancing towards the sky in streams of light, like a sheaf of diamond-tipped arrows. She whispered, "Oh, beautiful! My old father—my gentle mother! it is in the midst of God's beautiful creation that these deeds of hate are done. Yet, not of *hate*—let me be just. Let me be patient. Let no passion of mine distort a local necessity into a deed of hate. Oh, thou Crucified! who rememberedst amid the agony of the cross that Thy executioners knew not what they did, and prayed for them, give me a portion of Thine own divine calmness, patience, and justice. Let me remember the position, the education, the prejudices, the undisciplined passions of these men, and do *them* justice. How beautiful, how holy, this night. How sublimely calm. Let no storm arise in my own bosom to desecrate this holy calm."

And, oh! a divine peace was let down from Heaven into the depths of her spirit, and her heart was flooded with patience and love, still dilating into a strange joy.

"What is this? oh, angels! what is this? Every thing, from the centre of my own spirit to the bounds of creation, seems expanding, brightening, and rising."

A heavenly languor was stealing over her frame; she bowed her head upon the window-sill and fell asleep.

Heavenly dreams visited her—the walls of the room disappeared—the horizon expanded—the sky was lifted up—the heavens opened—the wings of angels brightened the sky—the voices of angels made melodious the air.

Oh, ye sorrowing! make clear the paths of the angels to your souls. Dismiss anger, fear, and selfishness, that the angels may come and minister to you.

> "Till sorrow, touched by God, grows bright
> With more than rapture's ray,
> As darkness shows us worlds of light
> We never saw by day!

* * * * * * * *

Early in the morning, Susan Somerville arose, and seeing the form of Anna reclining on the window-sill, and bathed in the glory of the morning sun, she went up to her, spoke to her, and receiving no reply, touched her, and started back with terror—ANNA WAS DEAD!

* * * * * * * *

The physician pronounced her death to have proceeded from some organic disease of the heart.

And no one disputed the decision of the medical faculty.

The coroner's jury came nearer the truth in their verdict—"A VISITATION OF GOD."

CHAPTER VII.

THE GERFALCON.

> This should have been a noble creature, she
> Hath all the energy that would have made
> A goodly frame of glorious elements,
> Had they been wisely mingled—as it is,
> An awful chaos—light and darkness,
> And mind and dust, and passions and pure thoughts,
> Mixed and contending without end or order,
> All dormant or destructive; she will perish—
> And yet she must not; such are worth redemption.
>
> *Byron.*

IT was a queer place—the chamber where young Frobisher lay at The Lair. The house being near the top of the mountain peak, and the room near the top of the house, it looked down a dizzy height.

The side of his bed was placed against one of the front windows, so that the patient had only to turn over towards it to enjoy a sublime prospect from the top of this loftiest peak. This window had been so obscured by cobwebs and fly-stains as to make a curtain superfluous, until the arrival of the neat little housewife, Zoe, who at once washed it off, and sent to the Dovecote for a clean, white muslin curtain, which was always looped back to permit the invalid to look out. This, with Zoe's new blue-and-white quilt, made the chamber look neat and comfortable enough, "considering."

Imagine an elephantess in a poultry-yard, tripping it lightly and softly about, for fear of treading on the young chickens, and you will have some little notion of how our Amazon stepped about the sick room of her patient upon the morning after Brutus had left home for the metropolis. It was very difficult for Gertrude to step softly or speak low. She was in the habit of shouting, roaring, leaping, running, and demolishing every thing she happened to touch, and otherwise expending her excess of vital energy; and now she tripped about the room as awkwardly as a condor in a quadrille might do. Zoe was in the room, too, but gliding so spirit-like about, that you would scarcely have known her presence. Their patient was supposed to be asleep.

"Hush-sh-sh-sh! Gertrude," whispered Zoe, as the former brought down a vial on the table, with the bang of a hammer on the anvil, shivering the vial in the act.

"Sh-sh-sh! ain't I sh-sh-ing all I can? I do wonders. Something will happen to me yet, with all this 'sh-sh-sh-ing.' Didn't I like to fall down stairs by coming softly up? And I shall break a blood-vessel, too, by trying to talk low—I know I shall; keeping in so much breath will explode my ribs—I know it will!"

"Hush-sh-sh, Gertrude; don't whisper; a whisper in a sick-room is more annoying than a talk," murmured Zoe, moving from the chamber, as the most effectual way of preventing conversation.

Left alone, Gertrude stepped up to the side of the bed, and, tossing back her heavy fall of yellow hair, stooped over the sleeping patient. He was lying with his face towards the window, his eyes closed, his black silky hair dropping soft shadows over his temple and throat. Gertrude looked over him as one might look at a very charming picture, or a beautiful sleeping child, and a smile dimpled her mouth, and half closed her eyes, as she looked—then the fair Amazon cautiously put out one finger, and softly touched a black curl that coiled upon the transparent temple—then suddenly drew back her hand, as though she feared that at a touch this Adonis might blow up, or melt away.

Still she looked at the sleeping face, as the child looks at something very charming and curious, but which it is forbidden to meddle with. "Oh, he is so beautiful! so beautiful!" she murmured to herself, still curiously fascinated by the exquisitely delicate features and complexion. At last, however, as she looked, she saw the black eyelashes of the youth begin to tremble on his white cheeks, and the corner of his chiselled lips began to quiver with suppressed humor. Her sanguine blood rushed to her brow just as he lost command of his countenance, and opened his eyes with an angelic smile.

"I was not asleep, dear Gertrude!"

"Oh! thank you for confession immediately following detection," said the Gerfalcon, moving from the bedside.

"Come back, dear Gertrude, I want to talk to you."

"No—you must sleep."

"I cannot, Gertrude; I have had sleep enough."

"But you haven't," said Gertrude, returning; "you have not. Come, shut your eyes, and go to sleep—that's a good boy—do—that's a dear boy—think what your mamma would say if she knew how you trifled with your precious health. Come, now, shut your eyes, and go to sleep, while I draw these curtains—that's a sweet boy!" and stooping down, Gertrude placed her two hands each side of his head, patted him, and ran away.

"What a strange girl! and how singular that she talks to me as though I were a child! But, perhaps, it is not so strange, since every American youth I have met looks older at fourteen—in the face, at least—than I do at twenty-six; that is the reason she takes me for a boy. Well! that mistake is not unpleasant in some of its effects. What a magnificent girl! the largest woman I ever saw, yet the most elegantly proportioned, and the most delicately finished. There is nothing coarse in her vast beauty. Why, her finger-ends, her eyelids, her nostrils, have that exquisite transparency, that fineness of fibre, belonging to the highest order of Caucasian beauty. But where are my thoughts wandering to now. I began by thinking how I should delight my friend Lawrence, by giving him a sketch of this Amazonian beauty found in the wilds of America—I have ended with— Well! I must not have those soft fingers clasp my face—rich lips hover over my lips so often!" *And the youth raised himself* on his elbow, *shook his pillow* vehemently, turned it, and dropped again exhausted. While looking through the window, his eye roved over mountain, wood, and water. "Oh, how I wish my friend Turner were only here, to paint this scene. Singular, they roam all over Europe—ground that has been travelled, painted, and described, until every part of it is familiar to all—while these unknown scenes of wildest beauty, of the most terrible sublimity, remain unsought," he murmured; then, "Pshaw! I talk of one thing and think of another. That peerless girl! She is unique! there is but one of her species! The clearest, purest eyes, the clearest, purest soul that ever any one looked through and through. That wondrous girl! She draws me towards her with the force of a maelstrom. I wonder who she is—who brought her up?" Then rising on his elbow, he looked out again upon the mountain-scene, while his thoughts roved from one subject to another with feverish vehemence. Growing tired of this occupation, he took a stick that stood near the head of his bed, in lieu of a bell, and struck it three or four times on the floor. Soon he heard a rushing up the stairs, and Gertrude entered, bearing a clean shirt in one hand, and a bundle of linen in the other.

"Ah! you have slept. That is right. You are strong enough to have your wound dressed and change your shirt, and then you shall have a broiled partridge for dinner. Zoe is broiling it now." And, approaching the bedside, she laid down her bundles and began to open his shirt-bosom to dress his wound, saying, all the time, "Now, don't wince, don't shrink; I won't hurt you, rough as I am—indeed I won't. There, be a good boy, and take it patiently." After she had finished dressing the wound, he said—

"Thank you, dear Gertrude. I will trouble you to bring me a glass of water."

"Yes, certainly," and she went below; and by the time the young man had performed his toilet, she returned with the glass of water, followed by Zoe bearing his nice little dinner on a tray. He took no more notice of Zoe than if she had been a little kitten. When the meal was over, Zoe took up the tray and left the room. Gertrude was about to follow, when the young man called her back.

"Will you not remain with me an hour, dear Gertrude, to help me to while away the tedious afternoon?"

"Oh, yes! certainly. I only want to go down and feed Borealis; then I'll return."

"Borealis!"

"Yes—my white horse."

"Oh!"

And Gertrude left the room for about half an hour. "Decidedly, Frobisher, you will have to do one of two things—make up your mind to woo and wed this young Amazon, or to avoid her altogether. I wonder what sort of an education she has received?" Seeing Gertrude return and take her seat by his bed, he turned around on his pillow, rested his head on his hand, and asked—

"Will you read to me, Gertrude?"

"Oh, yes!" said the Gerfalcon, rising and going into another room. Presently she came back, took her seat, and, opening her book, prepared to commence.

"What have you got there, Gertrude?"

"It is the legend of the Seven Champions of Christendom. It is a very grand thing. Takes my breath quite away to read it, although few things have the power to do that. Yes, a great work this! such splendid fighting!"

"Is that your first favorite, Gertrude?"

"Yes; but I have others."

"And what may they be?"

"Oh, I like St. George and the Dragon, Una and the Lion, and a German story Brighty read to me once—the Wild Huntsman—"

"That *who* read to you?"

"That Brighty, Mrs. General Stuart-Gordon—"

"Ah! you know her then?"

"Yes; do you?"

"I have met her; but now tell me your other favorites."

"Well, I like all those I named, because they had such splendid riding and racing and fighting and flying all through it; but, oh! my favorite of favorites!"

"Well, dear Gertrude, and what is that?"

"Oh, Milton's Paradise Lost! Milton's Paradise Lost! Oh! *there was* magnificent fighting there!—Heaven and Hell in battle-array—all space for a battle-field—the throne of the universe the stake—and angels and devils hurling planets at each other! Oh, that was a touch above the sublime. I can conceive that it took a blind man to write that!"

"Yes, dear Gertrude, a *blind* man—a man in spiritual as in visual darkness. War in heaven! Gertrude, does not that strike you as horrible blasphemy?"

"No, it don't."

"Well! we will not argue that question now. Now, Gertrude, is that all your reading?"

"Yes, I believe so.

"You should read history, and travels, and voyages, Gertrude.

"Oh, I do."

"Ah, that is well. What history and whose travels do you read?"

"Oh, I read the history of Jack the Giant-Killer, and Gulliver's Travels, and the Voyages of Sinbad the Sailor. Hush! what are you laughing at, boy! If you laugh so loud as that, you'll make your nose bleed—no, I mean your wound."

The young man was, in fact, laughing very heartily.

"Come! I shall get mad. I think it is very improper for boys to laugh at their elders."

"I beg your pardon, dear Gertrude. Now, go on with your reading."

"I won't; there now! You have put me out, and so you may just do without it."

"I submit, dear Gertrude," said the young man, in his mellifluous tones.

Gertrude looked at him, with her blazing eyes a little softened.

"Oh, I'll read to you," then she said.

"No, Gertrude."

"Oh, but I will."

"I will not hear you now, Gertrude."

"But I was only joking, my boy."

"Nevertheless, I will not trouble you."

"You are angry! that's what you are!" exclaimed the Amazon, bursting into fury, throwing down the book, and sending it with her foot to the opposite end of the room. "Yes! you are angry! *that's* what you are. Now, if you are angry, why don't you quarrel and have done with it, and then hear the reading. Why don't you quarrel, and not lay there saying 'No,' and 'No,' in your flute tones, to make me miserable. I never was crossed in my life, and I won't be crossed *now* and made miserable by a refractory boy! and I'll let you know, sir, that your tutor is in the house, and, if you do not behave yourself, he shall come up and give you a lesson in Greek. Why don't you quarrel, hey? What are you sulking about? If you are angry, why don't you quarrel? You won't? Well, I don't care—a dumb devil is better than a talking one!"

"Gertrude!"

The two syllables fell on her ears like two low, sweet, full music notes. She wheeled abruptly round to see him looking at her with his large, tender eyes. With a quick revulsion of feeling, Gertrude burst into tears, and hurried towards him, covering him with caresses.

"Poor boy! poor boy! It is I who am a barbarian! but then I always was so used to

Brutus. *He* quarrels back again, and we get our accounts evenly balanced. So I am not fit to deal with a gentle boy like you."

"Let us now return to the subject of your books."

"Shall I read to you?"

"*No.*"

"Oh! you won't let me do that. You are stubborn."

"What other books have you read?"

"None others at all, except the heathen mythology."

"And you like that?"

"Oh! very much indeed. The schoolmaster used to tell us that these heathen fables were a bunch of keys—that each fable was a key to unlock the mystery of some truth, if we would but fit the key into the right lock."

"Who brought you up, Gertrude?"

"Nobody! I came up of myself."

"Who educated you?"

"The schoolmaster."

"Satisfactory that—"

"If you mean who *raised* me, Brutus did."

"*Only* Brutus?"

"Yes! that is, we were left in charge of an old grand-uncle, but he fell into dotage before I can remember. Brutus took care of me—"

"Ah! that explains every thing. So you never had a mother's or any female relation or friend's care in your infancy and childhood."

"I had an old black nurse, who used to curse and shake me when she got angry, and smother me with offensive caresses when she was in a good humor, until I got big enough to scratch and bite and resist, and then Brutus took me away from her, and took care of me himself."

"How old are you, Gertrude?"

"I am nineteen."

"How old were you when your mother died?"

"My mother died the same hour that I was born; my father died four years after."

"Poor girl!"

"But, poor boy, are you sure you are not hurt by my rudeness? Oh, I am so sorry about it! I would not hurt you again for the world. Say, are you sure?"

The youth pressed her hand affectionately as an answer; then—

"Who are your friends and companions, Gertrude?"

Oh, I don't know; almost every body in the county knows me. They don't like me, I believe, but that is because they don't know how well I like them, and I have not time to teach them."

"Then you are no favorite in your neighborhood?"

"N-no. You see the young men give me nicknames—call me the Gerfalcon, and what not; and old men bob their chins down in their neckcloths, draw down the corners of their mouths, and look at me over the tops of their spectacles; and young ladies glance over their shoulders, avert their eyes, and whisper together when I come among them."

"So you have no friends, Gertrude, besides having no relations?"

"Oh, bless you, yes; these people are not my enemies, only they do not know how to *take* me, you see; and for friends, I have one very dear friend—little Zoe, who broils your partridges; only I don't intend to let Brutus marry her; and there is Britannia, who does me justice. Ah, by the way, you said you knew Britannia; how did you know her?"

"She is my cousin."

"She your cousin! Ah, now that you tell me, I declare I see a resemblance. Your hair and eyes are bluish black, like hers, and your complexion very fair, like hers—only that her cheeks and lips are of rich carnation, and yours are so pale—oh, so very pale," said Gertrude, her eyes softening, as she laid her hand upon the pallid forehead of the youth, "so pale. Oh, how could I have been such a bear as to growl at you, my poor boy! Ah, well, you came down here to see Brighty as your cousin?"

"Yes, dear nurse."

"Won't you tell me something about yourself, now?"

"Yes, dear Gertrude, and more than you expect to hear, perhaps:—

"Gertrude, in the neighborhood where I was born and brought up, in Ireland, there are hundreds of miserable men and women living in mud huts, on lumps of hard ground, spattered about (so to speak) through a vast morass. This great marsh is all that is left of the once valuable estate of Clonmachnois. The Earl of Clonmachnois died last winter in extreme poverty, leaving nothing but the marsh, the ruined house, and the empty title to his heirs. The sole heiress of this swamp, ruin, and coronet, is my cousin, Britannia O'Riley. Before the death of the old Earl, I used to walk about the margin of that vast bog, and saying to myself—'Here are hundreds of men, women, and children, starving in idleness; here are hundreds of acres of ground, producing nothing but malignant fevers; if these acres were drained, they could be made to support this population; there is work to be done, and people starving for the want of work; it only needs capital to adjust the one want to the other.' I was wealthy; I would gladly have purchased this bog from the old Earl, and, with my own means, have set the peasantry to work, and drained it or filled it up. That would have given the starving people present work and wages, and opened a fair prospect in the future to all concerned.

"Unfortunately for my project, the old Earl refused to part with any more of his acres. When he died, I went immediately to London—saw a relative who was in the cabinet—related to him all my plans and wishes for my native parish, and received from him the suggestion of seeking out and marrying the heiress, and then applying for the reversion of the title, which would give me a seat in the House of Peers, and so greatly facilitate my dearest projects for Ireland. At first, Gertrude, I revolted at the idea of looking up an heiress for the sake of marrying her; but after much thought, I decided that, as my heart was really free, as the happiness of hundreds depended upon my getting possession of that marsh, that I would seek out the young heiress; and, if I should love her, and be so happy as to win her love, that I would offer her my hand and fortune. Having gained a clue to the young lady's residence, I obtained, through my relative, an appointment as *attaché* to the present embassy; came out, and, through an advertisement, discovered the abode of my cousin, and came and found her sufficiently beautiful, elegant, and accomplished, to grace the highest circles, and found her, only to see her marry another!"

Gertrude had been silent all this time. At last, sighing vastly like a rising gale, she asked,

"And did you—did you—did you *fall in love* with Brighty?"

Why, no," smiled the youth, "not precisely. I had built some aërial castles, it is true, but"—then, sighing deeply, said, "it is a serious disappointment to me—the downfall of my hopes for Ireland."

Gertrude re-echoed his sigh. Gertrude was puzzled also. She could not reconcile the delicate features and complexion, the almost infantile clearness of brow, with the manly discourse of her patient. She did not call him "my boy" again, and she did not caress him after that. At last she ventured to say,

"I wonder how old you are?"

The young man smiled again, as he looked gently at her, and replied,

"I am twenty-two!"

"Twenty-two! No, you can't be. Louis Stuart-Gordon is only eighteen, and he looks much older than you do."

"That is because he is an American, and I am an Irishman. Even children's faces dry and wrinkle in your dry climate, while men and women retain an infantile freshness and softness of complexion long past middle age, in the climate of England and Ireland."

"Your countenance is very fair and clear, and oh! you have one beautiful place on your face."

"Where, Gertrude?"

"Oh! just between your eyebrows, so open, so clear, so benignant; it reminds one of celestial arches, of rainbows, and of angels."

The furious yelling of the dogs started Gertrude to her feet. She ran to the window.

"What is the matter with them, Gertrude?"

"It is the bailiff," she exclaimed, her color rising, her eyes sparkling, as she hastened from the room. "It is the bailiff. Now FOR IT. GLORY!"

CHAPTER VIII.

THE TWO ATTACHMENTS.

Wouldst beard the lion in his lair—
The tigress in her den?

Scott.

WHEN Gertrude reached the hall, she found Zoe standing midway its length, with the two bloodhounds crouched at her feet. She had just called them off the bailiff, who was now standing just within the door, his hat in his hand. Without deigning to notice him, Gertrude walked straight up to the standing rack, and taking her riding-whip down, began to crack it for pastime, just as a lady would open and shut her fan, or a dandy would twiddle his cane for amusement. The bailiff bowed—hemmed loudly twice or thrice to attract her attention, but Gertrude went on flinging out the lash of her whip and bringing it up with a loud report, while her fine, transparent nostrils expanded and quivered with spirit.

"Beg your pardon, mum! but you are Miss Lion, I presume?"

"Sir, you are very presuming!" exclaimed Gertrude, with startling, supercilious surprise, and glancing at the intruder from head to foot. Apparently used to rebuffs, the bailiff proceeded, without embarrassment, to say—

"You harbor a girl here who goes by the name of Zoe."

"I harbor a fellow here whose name I do not know."

"Excuse me, mum! My name is Jones."

"And a very pretty name it is, too—isn't it Zoe?"

"Ah, Zoe! That is the girl, is it? Well, Miss Lion, I have an attachment for this girl."

"Indeed, have you, sir? Really, how condescending on your part! how flattering to her! Do you hear, Zoe? This gentleman declares that he has an attachment for you. What do you say to it, Zoe? Can you bid him hope? He is a nice-looking young man enough—a trifle bandy-legged and club-footed; a trifle round-shouldered, and a wee-bit cross-eyed; not fair to look upon in particular, and rather hard-favored in general; still, no doubt, he has an excellent heart—at least his *attachment* does him credit! What do you say to him, Zoe?" Unable to comprehend this scene, Zoe gazed from one to the other, in distressing embarrassment. "You see, Mr. Jones, Zoe and myself properly appreciate the honor you have done us, while we gratefully decline your attachment. I am afraid, indeed, that in Zoe's case there is a *prior* attachment; we, therefore, decline *yours*, with many thanks, and with a high appreciation of its value. We think it does honor to your intellect and affections!" said Gertrude, with scathing irony. The bailiff was confused. Making an effort to recover himself, he said—

"Miss Lion, you cannot affect to misunderstand that I come at the suit of Cassinoe & Co., clothiers, Peakville."

"Oh-h-h! sure enough; he don't speak for himself. Modest soul! He presses another man's suit; he is not courting on his own hook. He is not Cupid himself—only Cupid's messenger! It's a merchant-tailor that has fallen in love with you, Zoe!"

"Miss Lion, I say that I have an attachment for this girl."

"Oh, *you* have. Just now it was Cassinoe & Co.—now it's *you!* Poor fellow, love has turned his brain; he doesn't know what he is talking about. Presently, he won't know which end he is standing on."

"Miss Lion, I repeat it, I have an attachment for this girl, and shall proceed to serve it."

"I think you won't, sir. To say nothing of *my brother's prior* attachment, I have an *attachment for this girl* that will be likely to stand *in your way.*"

"Miss Lion, I attach Zoe Wood as the property of Miss Susan Somerville, and at the suit of Cassinoe & Co., clothiers, Peakville—"

"Oh, you do. Well, *I* attach Zoe Dove as the betrothed of my brother, at the suit of Brutus Lion, lover and avenger! and we'll see whose *attachment* is the stronger!" exclaimed Gertrude, her bosom visibly heaving—her nostrils quivering. The bailiff walked up to Zoe, and touched her on the shoulder.

"HANDS OFF!" shouted Gertrude, bringing the loaded end of her riding-whip down upon the floor with the force of a hammer on the anvil, the walls resounding with the report. The bailiff involuntarily started back.

"Come here, Zoe," said Gertrude, holding out her arms for the child. The poor girl—the victim of a vague terror—fled to her protector. Gertrude, with flashing eyes, raised the end of her whip, menacing the bailiff, while she encircled the waist of Zoe by one arm, and laid the head of Zoe gently on her own broad, soft bosom.

"There, there, there, there, don't be terrified, Zoe; nothing shall hurt you, Zoe. I'll horsewhip the fellow within an inch of his life, if he does but lay his hand on you again, so I will."

"Miss Lion, are you aware that you are transgressing the law?"

"Mr. Bailiff, I don't care a fox's brush for any law but the ten commandments."

"Do you know that in harboring a slave you expose yourself to—"

"Mr. Jones, your way home lies straight out behind you. I give you two minutes' grace; and if at the end of that time you are not out of this hall, I'll put you out!" exclaimed Gertrude, her bosom heaving like the ocean waves in a tempest, her lips quivering, her nostrils distended, her eyes flashing, sparkling, and scintillating, as though they would explode.

"Miss Lion, do you know, are you aware, that you are threatening an officer of the law."

"Ha, ha, ha, ha!—ha, ha, ha! Yes, and if an 'officer of the law' don't take himself out of my sight in double quick time, I'll take an 'officer of the law' by the nape of his neck and the straps of his pantaloons, and throw an 'officer of the law' over the precipice. You know me, sir! *I am Gertrude Lion!*"

"I know, and the county knows, Miss Lion, that you are one who sets at defiance all the laws of delicacy proper to your sex."

"Hear the fellow, Zoe. Arn't you ashamed of being a woman, Zoe, when every 'critter' who sticks his spindle-shanks into a pair of ragged pants, thinks himself invested with the robes of a judge, and entitled to pronounce upon what is delicate and proper for the sex. Whew! what a famous thing it must be to be a man. One might be a great empress, a great actress, a great poetess. But, what's all that to being a little 'man!' But this par parenthesis. I waste time. Come! Your two minutes are up, sir! To the right about! *forward! march!*" commanded Gertrude.

Deep thunder seemed to reverberate around the feet of the Amazon. It was the low growls of her two bloodhounds, that crouched on either side of their mistress. They lay with their forepaws extended, their large heads laid upon them, their great red eyes glowing like balls of fire. They heard the altercation, and instinctively longed to spring at the throat of the intruder. Gertrude looked down, and noticed them for the first time. She smiled, laughed, crowed, shouted with delight as she looked at them. Then turning to the bailiff, she said—"See here, Mr. 'Officer of the law,' I am going to count *ten*—just *ten*—and please the patient Lord! if you don't get out of here before I get to ten, it will go very badly with you; for, as soon as I get to ten, I shall say, '*Seize him, Thunder! Seize him, Lightning!*'"

Before she had said another word, mistaking her threat for a command, the bloodhounds made a spring at the bailiff, who turned and fled, they pursuing him, they gaining on him down the hill.

"Good Heaven! he'll be torn to pieces!" exclaimed Zoe, in terror, while Gertrude fled out to recall the dogs. In ten minutes she returned, followed by them.

"And now," she said, "my dear Zoe, you must be put in a place of safety. I can't whip six men, and there is no doubt that six or eight will return here this afternoon. I did not believe it—I mean the worst of it. No, I did not dream it could be true, else I would have had you safe from this fright before this time!"

"But, dear Gertrude, what is it, then? Can they take me up for father's debts?"

"My dear Zoe, my dear little one, it is all a mistake. Have confidence in me, and rest easy until Brutus returns, and then all will be well. Zoe, promise to obey me in all things until Brutus comes, will you?"

"But my father!"

"My dear Zoe, the hand of extreme age has fallen on your father's head, calming his brain to infantile repose. *Do not disturb him, and he will not interfere with you.*"

"Well, I will promise you, Gertrude."

"Then, Zoe, go now, and make yourself up a little bundle of provisions, to last one day. Pack up a pillow and a sheet into as small a compass as possible; then put on your bonnet, and come down here, while I go and catch Borealis!"

Greatly wondering, Zoe went and did the bidding of her protectress. By the time she had returned to the hall, Gertrude had saddled Borealis, and donned her own riding cap. Mounting her horse, and taking Zoe before her, she cantered down the precipice, through the valley, up the ridge of rocks to Mad River passage, and took the path down the same frightful gorge that had witnessed the wreck of the carriage.

"Where are you taking me, Gertrude?"

"My dear child, to a place of safety. Don't ask any more questions—wait till Brutus comes home—have faith in me—I am the most disinterested friend you have in the world, except your poor old father, who cannot help you."

Zoe asked no more questions until they got to the grotto. Gertrude put her down, dismounted herself, and led her into the cavern.

"You are not a coward, Zoe?"

"Oh, no."

"Not afraid to stay by yourself all night?"

"Oh, no. I have been used to it all my life, when father would stay away all night with Major Somerville."

"Well, this is a safer place, under all circumstances, than the Dovecote. It is safe, because it is inaccessible—that is, to every body but *me*. Zoe, my child, you must stay here for a few days. I will bring you clothes, food, fruit, and books and pictures, and every thing to amuse your solitude; and I will come two or three times to see you. And you need not confine yourself to this cavern, but can wander at will through all this glen, for it is perfectly safe and inaccessible."

"Thank you, dear Gertrude. But if you will bring me up my needle, and thimble, and scissors, and my little work-basket, with the hexagon quilt, I shall not be lonesome. And, Gertrude, don't forget to feed my Bantam hens with Indian-meal dough—and be sure you don't forget to tuck father up warm when he goes to bed."

"I will remember every thing, Zoe. And now I must return to my poor patient, who is alone, you know. I will return again this evening. Good-by, Zoe!" she said, stooping and kissing her.

"Good-by, Gertrude!"

"God bless you, child!"

"And you too, Gertrude!"

And the friends parted.

The bailiff returned to Peaksville, breathing vengeance against the audacious Amazon. He would have a writ out against her. He would have her arrested, he swore in his wrath. Somewhat cooled and exhausted by his long walk back, however, and upon cooler reflection, he decided not to take any further notice of the matter, feeling very doubtful of its final issue, and having a shrewd suspicion that he would not figure to much advantage in the business—added to which was the knowledge that Brutus Lion was not a man to be enraged with impunity, he contented himself with the design of returning the next day to The Lair, with a *posse comitatas*, to take the girl.

On the next day, as Gertrude was waiting on her patient, the sound of many feet was heard in the hall below, accompanied by the furious barking and yelping of dogs, and rattling of blows.

"It is a descent, or rather an ascent, of the Goths and Vandals," exclaimed Gertrude, laughing; "however, I am ready for them," and she marched below. The hall was half full of men. The two dogs were kept at bay.

"Ha, ha!—ha, ha, ha! Really, gentlemen, there is strength in numbers," shouted Gertrude, as she bounced into the midst of the room, flung her torrent of hair behind her, and let fly her blazing eyes over the circle.

"Ha, ha!—ha, ha, ha! Try to keep each other in heart—do now; for I do not know what I should do with seven fainting men. Oh, don't be alarmed; I won't tread on you. I am always careful when I walk among ants. See, there are seven of you! Seven men come to take one little girl out of the arms of one big girl! Lord-'a-mercy! dear me, what heroism! Seven of you. You remind me of the Seven Champions of Christendom. You're an honor to your native country. Seven of you! seven heroes! Lord, if Brutus had been home, you'd have come seven hundred. Seven hundred heroes! What a gallant army!"

"Miss Lion," said the deputy sheriff, advancing from the group, "we have come to search the house for a girl by the name of Zoe, and, with your leave, we will proceed."

"And pray, sir, who are you?"

Her scornful eyes crawled over him from *head to foot.*

"I am the deputy sheriff of —— county.

"Oh! *Mister* Deputy Sheriff of —— county, I am *so* proud to make your acquaintance! *Mister* Deputy Sheriff of —— county, I am a hero-worshipper; and I have, this morning, for the first time, heard of your heroic exploits at The Crags. How, with a posse at your back, you courageously made an onslaught upon three feeble women and a weak old man—how manfully you terrified the two women to death, and how valiantly you in single combat knocked the aged man down! how you bound and carried him off in triumph—in company with his wife. Oh-h! *wonderful* Mister Deputy Sheriff of —— county, my poor house is *immortalized* by your visit! The ground *you* tread is *classic* ground!" declaimed Gertrude, waving her hand theatrically.

Every one laughed. The brow of the deputy sheriff crimsoned.

"Miss Lion, your pride and scorn are not to interrupt me in the discharge of my duty. I proceed to its execution. Gentlemen, follow me."

"Mister Deputy Sheriff, I do you homage!" exclaimed Gertrude, grounding her riding-whip, and bending her head in mockery.

A peal of laughter broke from the crowd. The deputy sheriff rushed out in a rage. Gertrude sprang to her feet, shouting with laughter.

The search was made—unsuccessfully, of course; and, at the end of the circuit of the house, the whole party returned to the hall, where Gertrude again mercilessly opened upon them her battery of sarcasm.

Just as they were preparing to depart, horse's feet were heard rapidly approaching, and Brutus Lion was seen to throw himself from his saddle and stride into the room.

"What's all this? what the devil is all this, Gertrude?" he exclaimed, looking around him in astonishment and anger.

"Oh! it is Mister Deputy Sheriff and his myrmidons come to take Zoe. It takes seven of them to do it, you see! and they have not succeeded."

"Where is Zoe?" exclaimed the giant, trembling in his Hessian boots.

"Ah! that's what Mr. Deputy Sheriff would be glad to find out."

"Then they have not arrested her."

"*Arrested* her! Pooh! am *I* not her keeper? Had Susan Somerville been *me*, Mister Deputy Sheriff would not have marched off with flying colors from The Crags."

"Then Zoe is safe, Gertrude?"

"Yes! Zoe is safe."

"Thank God!"

"Now, Brutus, don't turn a Miss Molly on my hands. S'pose she hadn't been safe. S'pose she'd been in danger. Could not you have rescued her?"

"Gertrude, my dear sister," said Brutus, without noticing her speech, but taking a packet from his pocket, "here, take this letter up to your patient—it is from some of his friends in England—and tell him I will wait on him in the course of the evening."

Gertrude took the letter and ran up stairs.

"Now, Mr. Power, I will speak with you alone, if you please!" said Brutus, beckoning the deputy sheriff into another room. "At whose suit have you attached this girl?"

"At the suit of Cassinoe & Co., clothiers, Peakville."

"How much is the debt?"

"One hundred and seventy-five dollars."

"I assume it. Come with me to Peakville, where the business can be legally arranged!" and, without another word, Brutus Lion, remounted his horse, and rode rapidly to Peakville, followed by the *posse*, most of whom had come to The Lair rather from curiosity than necessity.

In an hour, Brutus Lion had arranged the transfer of the liabilities, and again mounting his horse he galloped furiously towards The Crags, saying—

"Now to purchase the freedom of this poor girl, before another writ of attachment at the suit of some other creditor is served upon her."

He reached The Crags, threw himself from his horse, and entered the sitting-room.

What a scene of misery met his eyes. A corpse was laid out on tressels in the midst of the room. It was covered by a snow-white sheet, that, clinging closely to the body, revealed its deathly rigidity. By its side sat one solitary mourner, clothed in black, her arms extended over the body, her head fallen upon her arms, in an attitude and expression of hopeless grief.

Brutus approached reverently—

"Miss Somerville."

The mourner did not seem to hear.

"My dear Miss Somerville."

"Oh!" moaned Susan, without moving.

"My dear Miss Somerville, I am grieved, deeply grieved, to see you sorrowing thus."

The mourner raised her head, revealing a face frightfully ravaged by grief.

"Look there! oh, look *there!* She is dead—*dead! They said it* was disease of the heart!—enlargement of the heart. They were right. Oh, yes! they were right. Her heart filled and filled with sorrow, till it could hold no more, and then her strong heart broke—*it broke!* Anna! Anna!" and, with convulsive but tearless sobs, down went her arms again upon the form of the dead.

Tears filled the eyes of Brutus Lion. At any other time, and under any other circumstances, he would have left the mourner alone with her dead; but now, for the sake of the living, he was forced to intrude upon this sacred sorrow. In order to shorten the business as much as possible, Brutus, before leaving Peakville, had taken the precaution to get a bill of sale drawn up, ready for signature, and to draw his money from the bankers; so that what he now had to do was very simple—to make Miss Somerville understand that Zoe was her property, to gain her consent to the sale, and her signature to the deed. Again he reverently addressed the mourner—

"My dear Miss Somerville, I am very, very sorry for the cruel necessity that compels me to intrude on your sacred grief, but the welfare of a fellow-creature depends upon my gaining your attention. Can you give it to me for a few, a very few minutes?"

Moans only answered him.

Brutus laid his hand upon her hand, to attract her attention, as he said with deep earnestness—

"Miss Somerville, listen to me! The vital interest of Zoe Dove hangs upon this hour! The happiness of her whole life depends upon my gaining your attention for a few minutes. Will you hear me?"

And, taking her hand, he led her unresisting to the seat at the window.

Then, sitting down by her, he told her the whole story of Zoe, as the reader knows it. He told her in a very few words. Susan heard it with all the apathy of deep sorrow. She expressed no surprise; she *felt* none. Her deep grief shut out every other emotion. Brutus now proposed to purchase Zoe. He had to repeat this proposition several times before Susan, preoccupied by her sorrows, could be made to understand and receive it. Then, speaking slowly and brokenly, like one trying to break the spell of an over-mastering thought, she said—

"But if [illegible] is mine, as you say, I will free her at once."

"But, my dear Miss Somerville, that will not do. To emancipate her would require time and trouble. In the mean while, another writ of attachment, at the suit of some other creditor, would be served on her, and your benevolent designs defeated. What I propose is the only safe way. It is very easy. Here is the deed. You have only to write your name at the bottom, and she is mine—she is safe. Come, Miss Somerville, do it," pleaded Brutus, putting the pen in her listless fingers, and laying the deed before her.

"Well, well; as you think best."

And, scarcely conscious of what she did, Susan Somerville wrote her name at the bottom of the bill of sale, and Zoe became the property of Brutus Lion.

Susan Somerville tottered back to her seat by the corpse, threw her arms across the body, dropped her head on them as before, in the abandonment of profound sorrow.

Brutus Lion sprang into his saddle and galloped towards The Lair.

That evening, Gertrude hastened to the grotto, and brought back Zoe in triumph to The Lair. That night, Brutus, Gertrude, and Zoe, were grouped around the kitchen fire—

"Now, then, dear Gertrude, remember your promise, that as soon as Brutus should return you would explain this *mistake*."

Gertrude looked at Brutus; and Brutus, taking the hand of Zoe in his own, began—and slowly, cautiously, tenderly, revealed to her the secret of her birth, and her present condition. The shadows of the fire-light danced so fitfully upon her face that he could not see its expression while he spoke. He told her all —*all*.

At the conclusion of his story, Zoe remained silent, with her hands clasped upon her lap, with her head bowed upon her bosom. At last broke from her lips in passionate grief these words—

"Oh! my parents! my parents! what misery this deception has made! Oh! that I had never been born! My heart is breaking, breaking. Let me die; let me die now. I never shall look up again; never; no, never!" and, overcome by grief and shame, she sank upon the floor and rolled upon her face.

Gertrude and Brutus made a simultaneous spring to lift her. Brutus caught her to his bosom, laid her head against his chest, laid her arm up over his shoulder, and soothed her. This kindness touched the fountain of her tears, and she wept, long and freely. This weeping relieved her, as weeping always does. Her grief expended itself as a rain-cloud in showers. It is only quiet grief that kills, as ni the case of Anna. "Reaction equals action." At last, Zoe looked up clearly through her tears, and said—

"At least it is *you* who have bought me; is it not, Brutus? Come, it is not so bad as it might have been. There is comfort in all things, and at least I am to live with you *always*, dear Brutus. And I am to cook you nice dishes that you like, and to mend your clothes, and to make your house comfortable, and to make you happy in many ways. Indeed, it is not so bad, after all. It is not bad at all. After all, it is nothing but the name; only it came on me like a shock; and I was a little proud; that's all. I shall not be sad. People will say that the schoolmaster's adopted daughter, who used to be so proud of her housekeeping, is a slave. Well; I shall not hear them say it. I shall be here with Brutus; waiting on Brutus; and I shall be happy. Don't grieve for me, Brutus; *indeed*, I am not unhappy. Do you think that Zoe considers it such a misfortune to belong to Brutus? *No, indeed.* Come! don't weep, Brutus! dear Brutus! I hate to see tears in manly eyes;" and she raised her apron and wiped away the tears from the eyes of her great big lubberly nurse, who was quivering with emotion like a mammoth *blanc mange*.

"Zoe, my child!" he said, "did you think I would hold you bound a moment longer than I could help? Zoe, you should have been free to-day, but that the court-house was closed before I had even completed the purchase. Zoe, you shall be free to-morrow; and then you must return with your adopted father to the Dovecote."

"Must I leave you, Brutus?"

"Zoe, my dear child, *yes*. You cannot be my wife, Zoe—and I will not make you my mistress; and loving you as I do, Zoe—loving me as you do—*that* would be your fate if you lived with me, dear child. Take her, Gertrude;" and pressing one passionate kiss upon her lips, he tossed her in his sister's arms, and bounded from the room, bounced into his chamber, where the great big fellow might have been seen extended on his bed, sobbing, blowing, and floundering like a harpooned whale.

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CHAPTER IX.

MRS. GENERAL STUART-GORDON AT HOME.

Oh, sweetly is bedeck'd her bower, and gorgeously her halls;
Here treads the foot on springing buds, and there on velvet falls.
The massy curtain's graceful flow, the vase, the painting warm,
Those household echoes, mirrors bright, revealing the fair form;
Exotics that perfume the air with odors sweet and strange,
And shells that far in foreign climes mid ocean wonders range,
With countless gifts of taste and art, in classic beauty rife,
Are laid upon her homestead shrine, and grace her daily life.

C. Gilman.

It was autumn before the Stuart-Gordons returned to The Isle of Rays. It was impossible to tell which were the prouder—General Stuart-Gordon of his brilliant young bride, or Britannia of her grand old husband. She gloried in him; there is no error upon this subject—it is the truth. And he delighted in her; brightening and gladdening in her presence—that is another truth. And The Isle of Rays itself flashed, sparkled, and scintillated more splendidly than ever, when illuminated by the presence of Britannia. As for Louise, you know *she* was a ninny, and as for Louis, *he* was a pale face; the Island Palace was quite thrown away upon *them*. *They* might wander among the groves and arbors, with music and poetry, and such nonsense, all day, but the halls and saloons of the Island Palace were alone fitted for our grand General Stuart-Gordon and our brilliant Britannia. Mrs. Armstrong might say as she pleased, but her downy-hearted little Louise never could have "done" the Island Palace. For my part, I think each pair was well bestowed, and I sympathize with Brighty and the General—don't you? Mrs. General Stuart-Gordon came home in state, and astonished the neighborhood with many innovations. A new and splendid carriage was set up—five Arabian horses purchased—servants put in livery—three white domestics engaged, namely, a Parisian girl as lady's maid, an English matron as housekeeper, and a French cook.

What was the harm of it? It was not extravagance. General Stuart-Gordon could well afford twice the expenditure. It made every body happy, (except Mrs. Armstrong,) it *gave people employment*, and circulated *idle money*. *As for the darkies, they* were delighted with their new liveries as ever raw recruits with new uniform, or baby boys with their first breeches.

The day succeeding the arrival, the two ladies were seated together in the luxurious boudoir of Britannia.

"In truth, my dear Louise, you could have done nothing with this establishment without me. You would never have thought of any improvements. You would have received no suggestions from the gentlemen of the family. Men are apathetic in domestic matters—never think of refining their own comforts, while yet they keenly relish these comforts when quietly falling in their daily life. I admire keen and delicate senses, as an evidence of perfect physical development; but I do not like to see a lofty mind always debased in the service of these senses. I would not have the General thinking always of his dinner, his lounge, and his chibouque, though it gives me pleasure to see that he enjoys them, when, in the slipping off of the hours, they properly succeed physical or intellectual exertion."

Louise was pale, dispirited, disinclined to converse at all, still less to cavil at any thing Britannia might say or do.

"You are so pensive, Louise—and you always are, even by the side of Louis. By the way, where *is* the young gentleman this morning?"

"Gone over to The Crags to see Miss Somerville. He seemed very anxious to meet her, and so he left me immediately after breakfast."

"I wish he would not go there," said Britannia; then, immediately repenting her hasty speech, she paused abruptly.

Louise looked at her with a slightly querulous expression upon her pretty features, and asked—

"*Why*, Britannia?—*why* do you wish Louis would not go there?"

"My love, it is time to dress; some one will be calling here to-day; ring for Fleurine."

"But, Brighty, *why* do you wish Louis would not call at The Crags?" persisted Louise, glancing keenly, but furtively, at Britannia's face.

Mrs. Stuart-Gordon turned her eyes full upon the face of Louise, and, looking at her steadily, replied, slowly and gravely—

"Because Susan Somerville is a grief-stricken woman, and the visit of a gay young bridegroom may be unwelcome, as unsuitable."

Louise dropped her eyes beneath the steady rebuking gaze, and sighed.

"Now, Mrs. Louis, will you please to dress for dinner?"

"Oh, Britannia, I will dress; but I want to see my mother *so much*."

"The carriage is at your command, Mrs. Louis."

"Oh, Britannia, I cannot go *alone*. The General might not like it—Louis might not—"

"I hope there is not a negro on this plantation as great a slave as you are, Mrs. Louis. Why should they dislike it? Why should they stop you if they did? You pay a poor compliment to General and Mr. Stuart-Gordon. If they disliked any act of yours, Louise, believe me, neither would think of imposing a single restraint upon your actions; and, indeed, I should very much dislike to see them make the attempt. Poor little thing, you have been confined and fettered so long, that you have lost the use of yourself. You ARE FREE. Can I not electrify you with the fact into some life? Pray use your freedom a little. Ring and order your carriage at your own house; and go—try it, to see how it will feel. Heavens, child! are you all torpor?"

"Yes; why don't you SWAGGER, Louise? make a big fuss—sail about the house—order the servants—order the horses—order the master himself—make every body stand around you, or pitch over each other, in their haste to do your bidding! Oh! you'd see how *I'd* do it! How do you do, Brighty?" exclaimed the Gerfalcon, who had swooped suddenly down into this soft cushat's nest.

"How do you do, Miss Lion? I am pleased to receive you."

"Dear Gertrude, what a surprise! We did not hear you come up."

"How *could* you hear me run up on those soft woolly carpets? Lord, I wouldn't live in this house for *two* General Stuart-Gordons. I couldn't make noise here; if one shouted, the sound would be smothered in satin and down. What a place!"

"Sit down, Gertrude."

"Can't. Don't like the looks of the house; besides, I was just going over to The Crags to see poor, dear Susan, and I thought I would not pass you. I thought I would just run up, and see you, Mrs. Stuart-Gordon."

"You put quite a surprise upon us," said *Britannia*.

"*A shock, why don't you say? I 'spose I ought to have rung.* Lord, I never had patience to wait until a servant came to open the door, and a lady came down. I never indulged Mrs. Armstrong—even *her* High-loftiness—in such notions. Oh, have you seen your mother, Louise?"

"Oh, no, dear Gertrude; I have not even *heard* from her for four months. Just think of that. How is she, Gertrude? Can you tell me?"

"Mrs. Armstrong keeps very close house—sees no one but the minister and the doctor—"

"The doctor! Is my mother in bad health?"

"Well, *no;* I do not think so; but, having nothing else to amuse herself with, she thinks of nothing but herself—her own body, and her own soul—which is the reason, I suppose."

"Oh, Brighty, you hear. My mother in bad health."

"I do not believe it," said Mrs. Stuart-Gordon.

"Well, good-by, good-by! I must go, I must go. I should smother in sweets here.

"'Some love to roam o'er the wide sea foam,
Where the shrill winds whistle free,
But a chosen band in a mountain land,
And a home in the woods for me!'

And singing and shouting, she ran and bounded down the stairs and out of the house.

"Oh, Brighty, do you mark that? My mother in bad health."

"I do not believe so, Louise. Her minister and physician visit to amuse her, while they eat her dinners."

"Oh, Brighty, this family estrangement is killing to me; it is, indeed it is. Four months I have not heard from my mother. I, her only child, who never left her an hour during sixteen years. Oh, Brighty, go with me to see her."

"My dear Louise, I will attend you, if positively necessary, but my opinion is that you had better go alone. *My* visit might not be acceptable."

"But, oh! Brighty, *do* go. Surely you owe that much to my mother."

"I sent her our cards yesterday; she therefore knows that we are at home."

"That was a proud thing in you to do, Brighty."

"I was dealing with a proud woman."

"It would have been more friendly to have driven over to Mont Crystal this morning."

"Mrs. Armstrong should call here."

"Oh, Britannia, Britannia! do not cherish pride in view of all God's bountiful blessings to you. Go with me to Mont Crystal. Make the first advance yourself; you are the younger. This quarrel must be reconciled. It must—it must. It kills me. Oh, Britannia! I am not strong; I suffer so much; I eat nothing, scarcely; I sleep but little, and I am growing so feeble. I am sinking under it, Britannia. I shall die. Look how thin I am." And the poor child turned up her muslin sleeves, and held up the two slimmest little white wrists that ever were seen.

"Poor little arms! poor, dear little arms!" said Brighty, taking them and kissing them. "Come, sit in my lap, Louise, I want to pet you!" and she held out her arms. Louise dropped into them, sobbing. "Louis loves you so much, my dear. You ought to be happy."

"Ah! how can I while this estrangement lasts? Oh! I feel a sense of guilt, of treachery even, in the comfort I receive from Louis's affection."

"Sweet Providence! was there ever such a perverted head. You have been taught from your earliest infancy up, as a religion, to worship your mother, only her, and have been misled in respect to all your other womanly duties. But, poor thing, I will not distress you. I will go with you." And touching the bell, "Send Mrs. Louis's maid to her dressing-room," she said to the servant who obeyed the summons. The man bowed and withdrew. "Now, love, go make your toilet."

Britannia proceeded to make hers. In truth, Britannia herself desired the reconciliation of the families. A house divided against itself cannot stand. Britannia knew that the houses of Mont Crystal and The Isle of Rays were all-powerful united; that, divided, they parted the influence over the neighborhood. Besides, Britannia saw that General Stuart-Gordon, whom she adored, was himself uneasy at this estrangement, and she wished to see him comfortable. In addition to this, Brighty rather admired Mrs. Armstrong in some respects—rather sympathized with her pride, and cherished rather pleasant recollections of her late home at Mont Crystal. The reader must have observed one peculiarity of Brighty—namely, the propensity to look on the bright side of every event, and the fair side of every character; thus, though she perceived the darker traits of Mrs. Armstrong's character, she never dwelt upon them in her *heart; and though she* had experienced *some disagreeable things* at Mont Crystal, she only brought away with her its pleasant memories. This was no happy system of philosophy with Brighty; it was simply her happy nature. And then Britannia sympathized with Louise's sorrow, and with Louis, as suffering with Louise. Lastly, Brighty, like her old General, was too cordial-hearted not to like family-peace and good-fellowship. But as there is a leaven of unrighteousness in most human motives, so Brighty took a little wicked, womanish pleasure in going in state to make a visit of ceremony at the house from which she had been so summarily discharged five months before. Britannia made a grand toilet. Brighty became a rich and tasteful costume perfectly. Her appearance was decidedly distinguished. There was an air of high-bred refinement in the expression of her elegantly-chiselled profile in repose, and seen beyond the edge of her white French hat and drooping plumes. Never were satins, velvets, plumes, and cygnet down, better bestowed than upon Britannia. Taking a little card-case of wrought gold in her hand, Brighty descended the stairs, where she was soon joined by Louise.

They entered the carriage, and were driven to Mont Crystal. Hopes, fears, and anxieties in regard to her reception torturing the heart of Louise—a little genial desire, for family amity, a little feminine exultation, agitating the bosom of Brighty, as the carriage crossed the bridge between the island and the shore, and wound up the hill, bringing them in sight of the splendid front of Mont Crystal. The carriage drew up before the massive iron-bound green gate always kept closed. The porter opened it, and the carriage drove up the broad avenue, flanked on each side by a row of locust-trees, and stopped before the door. A footman alighted from behind, and opened the door. The heart of Louise paused in its beatings—she could scarcely sit—she grew pale. Britannia gave her footman her card—MRS. GENERAL STUART-GORDON.

"Take this to Mrs. Armstrong."

The man bowed, and waited to receive that of Mrs. Louis.

"Tell mother I'm here, and dying to see her," faltered the half-fainting Louise.

The footman went up the broad marble steps, rung, sent in the card. Brighty watched him from the carriage. She smiled to herself, her cheeks flushed, her eyes danced.

"Oh! she will not receive us, I know perfectly well, now," said Brighty.

Brighty was mistaken. "Mrs. Armstrong's compliments, and she feels grateful for Mrs.

General Stuart-Gordon's call, and begs that she will alight."

Brighty's heart smote her for pride, vanity, and injustice, in an instant.

"What word did mother send to me—what to me?" asked Louise, nervously.

The footman bowed—"Nothing more, madam."

"Oh, Britannia! she is angry with me! why is she angry with me?"

"My love, there is some mistake; your message was not delivered. There is some mistake—alight."

They descended from the carriage, and walked up the stairs, Louise clinging, half-fainting, to the arm of Britannia. They were shown into the west saloon—the crimson drawing-room; and going down its whole length, they seated themselves upon the crimson satin sofa in the recess of the bay window. The eyes of Brighty sparkled as she remembered that just six months before, seated on that very sofa, her eyes had filled with tears at receiving offers of hospitality from two poor girls, who pitied *her* poverty, and homeless and friendless condition. What a splendid contrast to that was her present condition. For Louise—she thought of the day when she sat upon that sofa a happy bride—happy in the love of her mother and her husband—happy in the fatherly affection of General Stuart-Gordon, and in the friendship of Britannia and her young companions. Who could have foreseen the blight that fell upon her joy. The door opened, and Mrs. Armstrong sailed in.

She *always* sailed—her stately form, ample robes, and slow gliding step, forcibly suggested the idea of a frigate under full sail. Louise arose to meet her, but growing very weak, she sank again into her seat. Mrs. Armstrong approached, and offering her hand to Britannia, who rose respectfully to receive her, she said—

"I am happy to see you, Mrs. Stuart-Gordon. Permit me to offer you my best wishes for your happiness in your new position."

Britannia courtesied, sat down, and said—"I hope you have been well since I had the pleasure of seeing you last, Mrs. Armstrong."

"Quite well, I am much obliged to you. Your appearance saves me the necessity of inquiring after your health, and leaves me only the pleasure of congratulating you upon the subject." Then turning to Louise, she said—

"My daughter!"

"My dear mother!"

They embraced—Louise sobbed.

"I cannot say the same for Mrs. Louis—she does not look well," said Mrs. Armstrong, sitting down in her easy-chair.

"I am sorry to admit that Mrs. Louis does not enjoy good health. I have no doubt, however, that meeting with you, madam, will restore her."

Mrs. Armstrong looked at her daughter again, and with more scrutiny, She was more than ever impressed with the fearful change in Louise's appearance.

"Come here, my daughter. Mrs. Stuart-Gordon, will you excuse us? You will find some admirable prints on yonder table. I would have an interview with my daughter."

"Oh, certainly, certainly, Mrs. Armstrong. I am no stranger at Mont Crystal."

Mrs. Armstrong left the room with her daughter. They went up stairs, into her chamber.

"Well, my child, you are looking around upon this room—what emotion does the view awaken in your bosom?"

"Oh, mother! mother!" exclaimed Louise, throwing herself upon the bosom of her mother.

They sat down upon a lounge.

"You are looking very thin and pale, Louise!"

"Oh, mother! I have *suffered* so much."

"Is Louis kind to you?"

"Oh, mother! good as Heaven to me."

"And General Stuart-Gordon?"

"Pets me like a pet kitten, mamma."

"And Mrs. Stuart-Gordon?"

"Treats me better than she treats herself. Nurses me as though I were her baby, mamma."

"You are very happy, then?"

"Oh, no! mamma."

"Why not?"

"Oh, mamma! this estrangement!"

"It is very serious, then, on their part. They speak of me with great aversion."

"Oh, no! dearest mamma! there is no member of the family who does not deplore it, I am sure; who would not do any thing to heal the breach."

"You are looking *very* pale, Louise, but perhaps there is a natural cause for this," said the dowager, taking her hand, and looking in her face.

"Ma'am?"

Mrs. Armstrong put a question.

"Oh, no! mamma! no! no!" replied Louise, blushing like a peony. "No! no; mamma! nothing of the sort! It was the parting with you, mamma, without taking leave of you. It was the not hearing from you for so long, mamma. And you are looking haggard, mamma; you have been sick."

"I have been sick *at heart*, Louise."

"My dear mother!"

"I have been *alone*, Louise."

"Oh! my dear mother, if you knew how glad I should have been to have had you with us, or to have been with you."

"But, Louise, are you quite sure of what you tell me?"

"Oh! *very* sure, dear mamma. Please don't ask me," pleaded Louise, crimsoning with confusion.

"We will rejoin Mrs. Stuart-Gordon now. *That* was all I wished to ascertain," said the dowager, with a diabolical smile, which was happily lost upon her daughter.

"And, mamma, this misunderstanding shall be reconciled, shall it not?"

"Yes, my daughter, as far as it lies in my power."

"Oh! thank you, dear, dear mamma. Now, now I shall be happy again."

They went down stairs, and entered the crimson drawing-room. Britannia was standing at the table, looking over some prints. She turned smilingly to meet the mother and daughter. She saw nothing in Mrs. Armstrong's face, always cold and impassible; but she saw in Louise's radiant eyes that peace was about to be proclaimed.

"Mrs. Stuart-Gordon, have you any engagement for to-morrow?"

"None, madam. Mrs. Louis and myself are perfectly at your disposal to-morrow."

"Then I will waive ceremony, and dine at The Isle of Rays to-morrow."

Britannia courtesied low, in acknowledgment of this grace. Louise caught her mother's hand and raised it to her lips.

"We shall be most happy to receive you, madam," said Britannia.

"Oh, mamma! Louis and the General will be so overjoyed."

Soon after, the ladies took their leave.

"A proud, presuming huzzy," exclaimed Mrs. Armstrong, as the carriage rolled away. "How dare she, after ejecting my daughter from her full position in that family—how *dare* she come here, with her carriage and liveried servants, to insult me, and to triumph over me? My ex-governess! I *hate* her! *hate* her! She blasts my sight. I wish she were dead. I cannot bring about her death, but—*I will see if she does not* tramp from The Isle of Rays. I think I have the lever by which to move her. Yes, my lady Britannia, you shall tramp. We want no second brood of children growing up on The Isle of Rays."

The carriage of the Stuart-Gordons returned to The Isle of Rays. The level beams of the setting sun were glancing aslant the island, as the carriage, recrossing the bridge, wound on between rows of cool shade-trees around the circular road that led up to the front entrance of the Island Palace. The whole front of crystal windows flashed back in streams of dazzling light the very last rays of the level sun, as the carriage paused before the portals.

General Stuart-Gordon was standing, smiling, on the marble steps, waiting to receive his ladies. He advanced to meet them as they alighted—

"Welcome home, ladies," he said, gladly, as he opened his arms, and, receiving them both in one embrace, pressed them together to his bosom. "You are radiating beauty this evening, my lady Britannia!" he exclaimed, as Brighty, just permitting him to touch her brow with his lips, sprung gayly past him into the house. "And you, also, my little Louise," he added, detaining her in *her* intended flight. "One would say that something highly agreeable had happened to you."

"Oh! there has—there has! I have seen mother—*dear* mother! and it is all made up, and she is coming here to-morrow. Are you not glad?"

"You have just seen 'mother,' little darling. Well, then, come and kiss *father!*"

"Oh, I will! I will! I will give you the kiss mother left upon my lips at parting. It shall be a peace-offering—a love-offering; take it!" and Louise clasped her arms around his neck, and pressed her lips fervently to his.

"You are a sweet girl, Louise."

"But, oh! did you hear me say that mother was coming here to-morrow?"

"Yes, love, I did; and she shall have such a welcome as shall make her forget every thing unpleasant that has passed between us; and now, my dear, I must go and thank Brighty for having taken you to Mont Crystal so soon."

"Has Louis returned?"

"No, darling, not yet. Now run and get ready for dinner, or we shall have to dine by candle-light. Yes, we positively shall have to do that, any how."

Louise hurried off to her room. Upon her dressing-table she found a note from Louis. Opening it hastily, she read:—

"DEAREST—Sudden and urgent business calls me to Peakville. I shall not be able to return to-night. L."

A momentary shade of vexation passed, as a light cloud, over the visage of Louise, and vanished. Louise was too happy to be annoyed by trifles. The family met at dinner. Louise explained, as far as the note did, the absence of Louis, and General Stuart-Gordon surmised that this business was in connection with the execution at Major Somerville's, and then he proceeded to give the account of it that he had heard in the course of the day.

Early the next morning, Mrs. Stuart-Gordon summoned her housekeeper, and gave her orders for the dinner. Little Louise was almost as happy as it was possible to be; and General Stuart-Gordon walked about leisurely and smilingly—

"And in the fullness of joy and hope
Seemed washing his hands with invisible soap,
In imperceptible water."

Nothing was wanting to complete his happiness but this family reconciliation, and now it was about to come off. When three o'clock struck, he mounted his horse, and, attended by Apollo on a second, rode down to the bridge, to wait for and welcome Mrs. Armstrong there. He waited on the bridge, amusing himself by looking at the reflection of the green banks and graceful trees in the clear water, or in looking towards Mont Crystal for the appearance of the carriage. At last it came in sight, and wound slowly down the hill. General Stuart-Gordon rode forward, and, while Apollo held open the wide gate to admit the carriage when it had crossed the bridge, the General advanced to the carriage door, and, bowing to his very stirrup, said, earnestly—

"Mrs. Armstrong, I am most happy to see you. Permit me to attend you to the house, where the ladies await your coming with much impatience."

"I thank you, sir, and welcome you back to our neighborhood."

Not one allusion, even by apology, was made to the past. The only difference was an elaborate deference of manner on the part of General Stuart-Gordon, and a stately graciousness on the side of the lady. Sending his servant *on to the house* to announce madam's arrival *on The Isle of Rays*, the courtly General himself *rode at the lady's* carriage side, opening the gates, pulling aside the boughs that crossed the road, &c. When the carriage drew up before the mansion, and Mrs. Armstrong prepared to alight, the General threw himself from his horse, opened the carriage-door, put down the steps, and, after assisting the lady to descend, drew her arm within his own, and led her up the stairs to the piazza, from whence Britannia and Louise advanced to receive her. Then, to show her the highest possible respect, instead of ringing for a servant, Britannia conducted Mrs. Armstrong to a dressing-room herself, performed the part of *femme de chambre*, by assisting the lady to lay off her bonnet, shawls, tippets, &c. Louise was there also, with sal volatile, cologne, and a glass of wine, in case her mother were fatigued.

The whole family strove, by showing Mrs. Armstrong the highest honor, to testify their appreciation of her visit. Britannia, entirely disarmed by Mrs. Armstrong's seeming kindness, and reproaching herself for the pride and vanity of her display on the day before, put off all state, sunk for the time the "Mrs. General Stuart-Gordon," became "Brighty," and gave her personal attendance to Mrs. Armstrong with a deference she had never shown in her governessing days. As for General Stuart-Gordon, he was so enchanted with Brighty's goodness as to fall freshly in love with her that day, and kissed her every time he got a chance.

If Mrs. Armstrong's *seeming* kindness had worked such miracles of reform, and created such happiness, what cannot *real* kindness *do?* Try its effect, reader, upon your worst enemy.

But Louis had not come home. Where *was* Louis? It was four o'clock, and the family were all in the drawing-room, and dinner was about to be served without Louis. Louise was not an exacting little wife. Her affection for Louis was too moderate and too disinterested for that; but she *was* getting a little impatient for his arrival—*would* have felt a little lost and lonesome but for the presence of her mother. They dined without him.

At last, late in the evening, Louis Stuart-Gordon arrived in haste, weary, haggard, dusty, and travel-stained. Without presenting himself in that condition in the drawing-room, he hurried at once to his own apartment, and sent for Louise. She hastened to him.

"My dearest Louise," he said, coming forward and embracing her, "how happy I am to meet you again after a day's absence."

"So am I glad to see you, Louis—and, oh! Louis, mother has come."

"I saw her carriage. I shall be very happy to see her."

"Now, dearest Louis—or rather, I mean, Louis, you naughty truant, you!—what kept you away so long?"

"Ah, Louise! a sad, sad business. Perhaps you heard of the execution at Major Somerville's?"

"Yes! yes—well?"

"Well, it appears that Susan wrote to my father for assistance, and we never got the letter."

"Oh! what a pity."

"And, of course, knowing nothing about the execution, did nothing to arrest its ill effects, and, in one word, Louise, when I called on Miss Somerville this morning, I found her alone, plunged in grief at the expected sale of her foster-parents, George and Harriet, who were then supposed to be in the slave-pen at Peakville. The sale was to have come off to-day. I hurried to Peakville at once, but arrived too late. A slave-trader from Alexandria had already purchased them, and had set out for that town this very morning. So, my own Louise, I went back to Miss Somerville with this news. She was so much distressed, and I sympathized with her so keenly, that I have determined to set out for Alexandria to-morrow morning, hoping to reach that city before the poor couple are shipped to the South."

"And so you will leave me again so soon, Louis?"

"Would you have me hesitate a moment, Louise?"

"Oh, no! Poor Susan! But how long will you be gone, Louis?"

"A week, perhaps, my dear."

"Oh, dear me, a week! It is so lonesome here without you, Louis."

During this little talk, Louis Stuart-Gordon had been changing his dress. His toilet being now complete, they went down stairs into the drawing-room. Louis Stuart-Gordon advanced to Mrs. Armstrong and welcomed her with an easy grace, raising her hand respectfully to his lips with an affectionate gallantry, as if nothing had happened. Then turning, he explained to his father the nature of the business that had detained him from home, at the same time announcing his intention of leaving for Alexandria the next morning.

"In that case, my dear son-in-law," said Mrs. Armstrong, "I shall invite your wife to pass the days of your absence at Mont Crystal. Do you consent to this, Louis?"

"*With great pleasure,* my dear madam, if Louise will be pleased, as of course she will, to avail herself of your kind invitation."

"What do you say, my daughter?"

"Oh, I shall be too happy."

Mrs. Armstrong remained all night at The Isle of Rays. After breakfast, the next morning, Louis departed for Alexandria, and Louise returned to Mont Crystal with her mother, there to spend the week of her husband's absence.

CHAPTER X.

A CHAMBER SCENE.

A light, commodious chamber
Looking out to the hills where the shine
Of the great sun may enter.
Mary Howitt.

THE second day from the arrival of Louise at Mont Crystal saw the carriage of Mrs. Armstrong drawn up before the Island mansion. General Stuart-Gordon advanced from the house, and came down the steps to assist the lady to alight.

"I am overjoyed to see you again so soon, my dear madam, and my little daughter-in-law whom we have missed so much. She is within there, of course. Mrs. Stuart-Gordon will be delighted to see her—"

"My daughter has not accompanied me, sir. I came only upon a matter of business, to which I crave your attention for a few moments, sir."

"Certainly, madam," said the General, offering his arm to the lady, with certain vague misgivings. "Certainly, madam. Apollo, lead the way into the library, and then let your mistress know that Mrs. Armstrong is here."

"Sir, excuse me. I shall not present myself to your lady this morning."

"Can we not persuade you to spend the day with us, madam?" said the General, in his blandest tones.

"Once more, sir! business alone brought me to The Isle of Rays," replied the lady in a freezing tone. Again vague but gloomy presentiments darkened the mind of the General, as he led Mrs. Armstrong into the library and handed her a chair. She seated herself with cold dignity. General Stuart-Gordon followed her example, and remained waiting for the lady to speak.

"Be so good as to send your man from the room," said Mrs. Armstrong.

"Go, Apollo," commanded the General; and Apollo went. "Well, madam, how can I serve you?" asked General Stuart-Gordon, after waiting some minutes for her to begin.

"Sir, who is the heir of this Island Estate?"

"My only son Louis, of course."

"By what right does Louis inherit this property?"

"In right of his mother, Margaret Stuart-Gordon."

"Then Louis Stuart-Gordon is master of this estate and mansion-house?"

"Not as *yet*, madam!"

"Let that pass for the present. But, when I bestowed the hand of my daughter, Miss Armstrong, upon your son, Mr. Stuart-Gordon, it was understood that *she* should take the head of this establishment. Was this so, or was it not so?"

"Certainly, madam, that was the *tacit* understanding, but—"

"Never mind 'but.' This house was refurnished, fitted up, to suit the taste of Louise, was it not?"

"Of *course*, madam, but—"

"Louise was to have been its mistress—was she not?"

"*Certainly*, madam, but—"

"Who is its mistress?"

"My wife, Mrs. Stuart-Gordon, senior."

"Then the conditions of the marriage contract have not been fulfilled on your part."

"The *implied* conditions, I grant you, madam, have been, so far, infringed. It was rather assumed than stipulated, that Mrs. Louis should take the head of this establishment—and at a time, too, when my own marriage was not in contemplation."

"Sir, I, for one, make no allowances for after-thoughts."

"Mrs. Armstrong, pardon me, but this is really very extraordinary on your part."

"General Stuart-Gordon, I am one of very few words; and, in *one* word, my business here to-day is to remind you of the conditions upon which the marriage of Louis Stuart-Gordon with Louise Armstrong was contracted, and to request your fulfillment of your part; in short, to ask you to give up possession here to the rightful owners—your son and his wife."

"Mrs. Armstrong, had any other than yourself have made so strange a proposition, I should ascribe their words to a disordered intellect."

"Do I understand you to refuse this, sir?"

"Most certainly, madam; your singular *proposition is not to* be entertained for a *single moment.*"

"Then hear me, sir. I said that I was a woman of *few* words; you know that I am not a woman of *vain* words; and I tell you," she said, rising, folding her arms, standing before him with her determined jaws firmly set, her determined eyes firmly fixed upon him—"I tell you," she said, slowly, through her closed teeth, "that, until you and your wife evacuate these premises, Mrs. Louis Stuart-Gordon never sets foot upon The Isle of Rays, and never exchanges one word with any one member of the Island family. I waited my time. I have her. She is in *my* hands now!" and, turning haughtily, she strode from the room, leaving General Stuart-Gordon standing, wonder-struck, in the middle of the floor, standing stock still, and staring straight ahead, until a pair of jewelled hands flashed down upon his breast, and a pair of sparkling eyes glanced up into his. Britannia was standing before him.

"Well what is it? You are all amazed. What is the matter?"

"Ruin! ruin! Brighty. Do you see that woman?" he said, drawing Britannia after him to the front window, and pointing to where Mrs. Armstrong's carriage was rolling away. "Do you see that woman? 'She is the infernal Até in good apparel.' She has deceived us all; her visit, her pretended reconciliation, was all a ruse, to get Louise into her power again. I would give ten thousand dollars to have Louise once more within the walls of this house. My dear Britannia, if, with your woman's wit, you will only conjure Louise back again to this room, ask me for any boon that moment, and it is yours."

"Nay, I am no match for Mrs. Armstrong—neither do I understand one word of all this quarrel, from first to last."

"Then, Brighty, I suppose that, first or last, you must hear it. Mrs. Armstrong had honored me with her preference—was highly infuriated at my marriage—and now that she has Louise safe under her own thumb, and knowing as she knows her absolute power over Louise; and knowing as she does that Louis is too fastidious to resort to legal measures for the recovery of his wife, she has avowed her determination that Louise shall not set foot within the limits of The Isle of Rays, or hold any intercourse with any member of its family, until we—you and myself—shall have evacuated the premises. There! I said so. Your bright eyes, my dear, are as wide open with astonishment as mine were when you came in and found me."

Brighty's eyes were now cast down; she seemed buried in deep thought for a few minutes, then suddenly breaking the thread of her reverie, she took his hand and said—

"Come! luncheon is served in the oaken parlor," and drew him out. Over that luncheon the General and Brighty had a long and confidential conversation.

It was yet early in the morning when Mrs. Armstrong returned to Mont Crystal. Louise sat sewing in one of the large front chambers, whose lofty windows command the river, isle, and opposite shore. This was Mrs. Armstrong's summer sleeping-room. Every summer she migrated from the thickly carpeted and heavily curtained crimson bedroom to this large airy chamber, with its many tall windows, its white mantelpiece, its straw-matting floor, and its white dimity curtains, counterpanes, and toilet-covers. This was an airy, fragrant chamber, with a fine prospect from its windows. Louise shared this apartment with her mother, and now she sat at one of the front windows, idling with her needle and thread, while her heart went forth gladly into the morning glory of the sunlight. The morning air had tinged her delicately fair cheek with the faintest rose tint, a little deepened as it budded into the classic lips. Louise had always been *pretty*, but there was the germ of an exquisite beauty in her face, that could only be developed by a happy love. She was still pausing, with her needle in her hand, still looking forth upon the glorious landscape, when her mother entered from her drive. Mrs. Armstrong had already divested herself of her riding-dress, and now taking out her knotting, she sat down near Louise, who took her hand and pressed it reverently to her lips, still gazing forth upon the river, as though something there fascinated her glance.

"You seem to like this front window, my daughter!"

"Oh! I do, dearest mother! I like the prospect from it so much. Look, mother, look! See The Isle of Rays, shooting streams of light—radiating sunbeams like an archangel's crown! Oh, mother! that Isle, with its sparkling fountains and flashing waterfalls, seems to me as a glad, glad spirit, rejoicing in its life of light, and for ever and for ever chanting its song of joy to its Creator! Oh! I love that Isle! I love it! I almost pray to it, as to some guardian—and when I am there, it seems to me as if the *vast and radiant* wings of some *bright angel enveloped me!* and even now its waters seem to smile at *me*—its trees to wave their arms to *me*—it attracts, fascinates me—woos, invites me. Oh, see! it seems to nod and smile at me, mother; and my spirit flutters in my bosom, and plumes its wings, as though it would spread them, and, cleaving through all this sun-bright air, seek the bower of the blessed angel Islet—"

"Ahem! poetry is very well in its place—that is, in gilt-edged books, bound up between embossed covers, and laid upon pier and centre tables, to while away the hours of idle morning visitors and loungers; but it is very much out of place here. You will please to remember, Mrs. Stuart-Gordon, that sentimentality is decidedly vulgar. Your manners, since your residence at The Isle of Rays, have deteriorated lamentably. You have lost that air of *repose* that once distinguished you—"

"But, oh, mother! it is so difficult only to *pace* when one wishes to run—only to smile when one wishes to laugh—to speak low when one wishes to break out in a song. Why may not one be glad and gay in a free mountain scene like this, mother? Oh, look, mamma! the fountains on the Isle flash and play in the sunbeams all day long as they please—and the cataracts leap into the bosom of the river, making glad music through all the sunny hours—and the river flows on in light with its silent hymn of joy; and the forest trees wave. Oh! see how they bend and nod and throw up waves of green light to the skies—*their* offering of love to the skies, that smile back in love upon them. And the flowers, mother! Oh! stoop a moment from the window, and smile at them—if an open flower expresses any thing on earth, mother, it is an *open smile*. And, mother, did you ever notice the rose leaning its cheeks sideways, caressingly, upon the green leaves that cluster tenderly around it? Oh! mother, is there any thing in human nature that expresses beautiful love more beautifully than that? Now, mother, when I look out upon nature, and see nothing but beauty, love, and joy—and when my own heart leaps in my bosom to join the grand diapason of grateful harmony—*why* must its expression be checked and suppressed? It kills me, mother! it kills me!"

"It is Louis who has put all this nonsense into your head. You must never heed poets, my daughter. They are all—to use an expressive Scotch term—'daft.'"

"Yes, it was Louis who revealed the life, the soul of nature to me—who translated the language of nature for me. One day we sat on a bank of violets, and I stooped to pluck one, and his gentle hand dropped softly upon mine, and stayed its purpose. 'Do not pluck it, Louise,' he said, 'but look at it! see how full of expression it is!' And I looked. The violet had nestled itself under the shelter of its green leaves, and it peeped out at us with as much archness of expression in the bend of its head, in the droop of its petals, as ever you saw in the sidelong glance of a sky-bird, with its head bent aside—or the speaking eyes of a wild kitten, backing itself up into a corner. And we both watched the violet, as it seemed to watch us, and we would no more have plucked it than we would have tortured the bird or the kitten. Louis never kills a bird or squirrel, or any thing else, or even pulls a flower. He lets every thing alone—every thing live. Every thing lives to Louis!"

"Oh, how childish and puerile, not to say ridiculous, all this *is!* I see that I shall have a good deal of trouble in reforming and perfecting your manners, my dear Louise."

"No, you will not, my mother," said Louise, whose gayety had been gradually subsiding. "No, you will not, my mother. There is something in the very air of this house that subdues me—its walls have the cold grandeur of the glaciers; they awe and chill me. It is only when looking forth from its windows upon The Isle of Rays, that, remembering my life there, I feel glad and wild."

"That is an over-long speech for an epigram, Mrs. Stuart-Gordon."

"Dear mother, I did not mean that—excuse me—forgive me. I did not know what I was saying."

"Exactly, Louise. When you are not absurdly gay, you are ridiculously petulant. Why can you not be serene, like Miss Somerville? *Then*, perhaps, you would stand a better chance of retaining your hold upon your husband's heart."

"Why, mother—how is that? What do you mean?"

"I mean, my dear child, that you are not quite so much to the taste of Louis as your *friend*, Susan Somerville, is."

"Mother, you distress me—so much," said Louise, her features growing pale and sharp.

"My poor girl—my dear Louise, there is but one disinterested and ever-enduring love in the world, and that is the love of a mother."

"Well, mother, I know that. You have told me a million of times. I have read it in all the books you ever put in my hands. I have even written it in copy-books. I know that. But still I *do* think Louis loves me with a 'disinterested and ever-enduring love,' although I may not be so worthy of him as Susan Somerville would have been. We do not *always* love only what is superior—we sometimes love inferior beings for their very need of us—so Louis, so Brighty, so the General loves me."

"*Poor* child, they none of them love you—they cajole, caress, flatter the heiress of Mont Crystal. No one loves Louise, but her mother—"

"Louis, mother, Louis loves me."

"How do you know that?"

"Oh, by a thousand signs—by every look, word, tone, and gesture—by every loving act of his—by every happy emotion of mine."

"Ah! good. Did you ever see a play, Louise?"

"Yes, mother, but I am sick at heart. I do not wish to talk about plays or other indifferent matters. Mother, Louis—"

"Nonsense! What was the play you saw, Louise?"

"Romeo and Juliet."

"There could not be a better play for the illustration of my subject. I can imagine that this play moved the sympathies of your unsophisticated heart, Louise. Who played Romeo?"

"George Barrett, mother."

"A celebrated tragedian, to judge by newspaper criticism. Well, the passion was well counterfeited—was it not?"

"Ma'am?"

"The love, the tenderness, the pathos was well played—was it not?"

"To the life, mother. It wrung my heart like a real tragedy enacting before me."

"Yet you know it was acknowledged acting?"

"Certainly, mother."

"Well, my dear Mrs. Stuart-Gordon, there is *more* acting, and more *consummate* acting *off* the stage than on it. The family at The Isle of Rays is a corps of consummate actors, of which Louis Stuart-Gordon may be called the star. They love you *not*, Louise. There is not one of them who would not have preferred that Louis had married Miss Somerville, had she possessed a fortune equal to yours."

"Oh, mother, mother, *what* makes you think so? Mother, Louis likes me, indeed, Louis does like me."

"Yes, he likes you as the Romeo of the acted drama *liked* the Juliet, but he *loves* Susan Somerville."

"Oh, mother! this is not true! You are mistaken; oh, you *must* be mistaken; this cannot be true;" and Louise dropped her head upon her hands and sobbed.

"Recall, if you please, Louise, the agitation and illness of Miss Somerville at your wedding—recollect her precipitate retreat immediately after the ceremony—"

"Oh, yes! yes! I remember that; oh, I recollect many things that *then* I could not account for, that *now* seem clear enough to me. Yes, I remember now that many of the young girls bantered Susan, and said that it had been generally reported that she and Louis were to have been married."

"And so it *had* been generally reported, and Louis had given every color to the report by going every afternoon and spending the whole evening at The Crags, and, whenever her grandfather was absent, sending for Miss Somerville to The Isle of Rays. In a word, both the General and Louis admired and loved Miss Somerville, and Louis would gladly have married her, and the General would gladly have consented to the marriage, had the young lady possessed an adequate fortune; and the grievous wrong is, that Louis, after selfishly winning the affections of this girl, has cruelly abandoned her, and married another woman whom he cannot equally love."

"Yes, he does love me, mother. But oh, poor Susan! Ah, yes! it is true,—too true! I feel sure of it when I recall her agitation, her change of color whenever Louis looked at or spoke to her. Then her fearful lapse of spirits, her rapid decline of health and strength in the days that followed my marriage; and I remember that Brighty always sought to ward off observation from her."

"Yes! that young lady was in the secret! She was leagued with *them*, and against *us*."

"Poor, dear Susan! But oh, mother! why did you not tell me all this *before* it was too late?"

"Because I have only recently suspected it myself, and, following out my suspicions, have confirmed them."

"Poor Susan! how could Louis have been so thoughtless! for whatever of wrong has been done or suffered, it has been from thoughtlessness; Louis intended no wrong."

"*Thoughtlessness!* His actions have sprung from else than thoughtlessness; *his course has been calculated with mathematical* exactitude. Susan Somerville was not rich enough to be his wife, but she is poor enough, pretty enough, and loving enough, to be his mistress." Louise suppressed a cry of horror and disgust. "Certainly; so he marries the unloved heiress, and takes the loved beggar under his protection."

Louise dropped her head upon her mother's shoulder, and groaned—

"Oh, mother! what horrors are these you are revealing to me! My brain is reeling, reeling! my mind wanders. This is very dreadful, and yet it is of Louis—*Louis* that you speak! Oh, this is very, *very* horrible, and yet it is my mother that tells me. Yes, yes! my mind wanders—loses itself. All support, all reliance seems falling beneath me! I am lost—dying! Mother! mother!" and Louise lost her voice, and grew deadly pale and faint. Mrs. Armstrong supported her on her bosom, while she bathed her temples with Cologne.

"No, not all support is lost to you, my child. Your mother still remains, Louise."

"Oh, my mother! but this that you tell me, this that you tell me! It is too horrible to be true; but you, *you* tell it to me—*you*, whose word is truth; and to doubt your word, my mother, would be blasphemy."

"Do not sink under this, Louise. Your mother remains to you, my child. You have suffered a cruel, cruel wrong, but do not die under it."

"Alas! *Louis*. The lost angel himself was not more beautiful, more treacherous than Louis. Lay me down, mother; I am weak all over; I cannot sit up. Lay me down, mother." Mrs. Armstrong supported her to one of the white dimity-covered settees, laid her on it, sat by her, fanned her, bathed her forehead with Cologne, and talked to her in a soothing and subdued tone. Seeing that, even with the aid of these efforts, she did not revive, Mrs. Armstrong touched the bell and summoned Kate to bring a cordial. When Louise swallowed that, a little faint color came back into her cheeks, and she looked up. Then Mrs. Armstrong said to her, in order not to lose an inch of ground—

"Do you know that I have been to The Isle of Rays this morning, my daughter?"

"No, my mother, I did not."

"Yes, my child, I went there again; I went there to have justice rendered my child."

"Justice! Alas! mother, if Louis does not love me, and loves Susan Somerville, he cannot help it; and there is an end. Nothing can be done, and nothing remains to me but—*to die!*"

"My poor Louise, like a heart-sick child as you are! that is not the justice I spoke of. You know that you were to have been the mistress of that house, Louise, and that you are not; that your former governess is elevated to that dignity."

"She is welcome to it, mother. I do not care about it. Oh! if you knew how little I care for such distinction—how much I loved Brighty—how willing I was that she should take the burden, with the dignity, off my shoulders. Ah! now I care for nothing, nothing!"

"But I care for you, Louise; I, your mother, feel interested in your welfare. And I say, Louise, that you have been cheated out of your affections and your rank, both."

"For the latter I do not care. Let us talk no longer of the former, mother."

"Let me conclude, my dear, and then we will be silent for ever upon the subject."

"Yes. Silence! darkness! quietude! *death!* that is what I want, mother."

"Louise, when I went this morning to The Isle of Rays, I was met with refusal—defiance."

"Alas, mother!"

"That affected reconciliation, Louise, was all a piece of wicked hypocrisy. As soon as I demanded justice for my daughter, I was met with insult that obliged me to leave the house."

"Oh, mother! I do not know what justice we want. *I* want peace. My very heart is dying in my bosom, and my mind wanders—wanders—wanders!" she groaned, turning her head from side to side, uneasily.

"Be at rest, Louise. Remain with your mother, who loves you. I do not flatter and cajole my child, it is true, for my affection is as dignified as it is disinterested and enduring."

"There is no doubt about *your* affection, at least, my mother."

"Then you will content yourself to remain with me, Louise?"

"Alas! where else should I go, mother? Back to a nest of ——; and yet I *do* love them—Brighty, the General, and dearest Louis. And though they should betray me a thousand times, I cannot help loving them *still, loving them fondly.*"

CHAPTER XI.

"THE THUNDERBOLT."

> I part with thee
> As wretches that are doubtful of hereafter
> Part with their lives—unwilling, loath, and fearful—
> And trembling at futurity.
>
> *Rowe.*

Louis Stuart-Gordon had hurried to Alexandria as fast as his horse could take him thither; had reached the city in season, and had been so fortunate as to repurchase, at a small advance, the two old people. Giving them a pass and money to bear their expenses, he had left them to follow him, and set out for home. Blithely Louis started on his return. He was far too young not to feel a keen delight in making others happy. He was very happy just now. The sunshine was so bright; the air so fresh; the landscape so beautiful; the song of the birds so thrillingly rapturous; the voice of the waterfalls so glad; his own physical organization so harmoniously attuned to all this beauty and joy, that it was no wonder the heart of Louis beat in response to all this glory of nature. Then all the past was so delightful to recall; the future so blissful to anticipate. Had he not just made a whole family happy? Was he not about to be supremely happy himself, in meeting Louise? Was he not in the very morning of life—just eighteen—with a beautiful and beloved wife two years younger; with an Eden home; with congenial friends; with immense wealth; with a heart and mind capable of enjoying his position in the highest degree; with every blessing himself—with great facilities of blessing others! Never had Louis so keenly appreciated the blessedness of his life, as very late, on the evening of his return, when approaching the river, the white walls of Mont Crystal, between the divided forest that crowned the hill, loomed up in his sight, just discernible in the bright starlight. He would go there first, and defer his visit to The Crags and his return to the Isle until the next day. He spurred his horse into a gallop, and rode rapidly up to the outer gate; and flinging himself from the saddle, he attempted to open it. It was locked on the inside. It was a heavy oak gate, painted green, and fastened with a strong chain and padlock. He rapped loudly with the loaded end of his riding-whip. The noise of his rap dying away in echo, left silence. He listened. Nothing was heard but the chirping of those little insects that wake at night, and the slight rustle of the leaves, and the low murmur of the waters. He waited. No one replied. A vague fear passed over his mind. Was Louise ill? He looked up the long locust avenue at the house, some hundred yards back. It was closed up—but then it was always so after dark. He rapped again, loudly and long; watched, listened. Again the sound died away in silence, leaving nothing but the low rural night sounds audible. He rapped a third time, as loudly as possible, and shouted, "The house, the house, there!" Again he watched, listened, watched. This time he perceived a figure approaching down the shaded avenue. It was Kate Jumper, who stood now at the gate.

"Ha, Kate, how do you do? How is Mrs. Louis and your mistress? You kept me waiting here a long time, my good Kate. Where is the porter? Come Kate, my good woman, unfasten the gate; I am impatient; be quick!"

"The ladies are not at home, sir," replied the mulatto, stolidly.

"Not at home! Oh, I am sorry for that! Where have they been spending the day? They are late on their visit. However, admit me, Kate; I will await their return."

"The ladies will not be back to-night, sir."

"Not to-night? How singular! Where have they gone?"

"I do not know, sir."

"When are they coming back?"

"I do not know, sir."

"When did they *go?*"

"I do not know, sir," said the mulatto, still guarding the gate.

"You 'do not know' when they went—you, who were here all the time! Kate, what does all this mean?" exclaimed the young man, in surprise.

"*I do not know, sir.*"

"You 'do not know' still! Explain yourself, woman," commanded Mr. Stuart-Gordon, looking severely at her dogged countenance.

She paused in silence.

"Speak!"

"What must I say, sir?"

"Where are your ladies?"

"I do not know, sir."

"Tut! I am a fool to grow impatient at a sulky negro," thought Louis.

Then his countenance lighted up, and he exclaimed—

"Oh, I have it! They are at The Isle of Rays. Yes, certainly, they are at The Isle of Rays. Strange I did not think of it at once. Say, Kate, are they not at the Isle?"

"I do not know, sir."

"*Tchat!*" exclaimed Louis, between impatience and amazement at the woman's sullenness, as he hopped into his saddle, and turned his horse's head towards the Isle.

"So best; expecting me to go home first. Louise has gone home to receive me—that dear, gentle Louise." And Louis quickened his horse's pace into a gallop, and in half an hour reached the Isle, fully expecting to find the drawing-room lighted up, and wearing a festive appearance for his reception. He galloped rapidly up to the door. There was no unusual brilliancy about the front entrance. He threw himself from the saddle, gave the bridle to Apollo, who stood to take it, and with a hasty question of "All well at home, Apollo?" to which Apollo replied, "Yes, sir," he hastened into the house, through the hall, and entered the oak parlor. His father and his *belle mère*, as he fondly termed Britannia, were at supper together; and a third cover was laid for himself, as though they had expected him, but finally sat down without him.

Louis started, looked around with surprise; then, having hastily shaken hands with his father, and kissed the cheek of his step-mother, Louis, again looking rapidly around, exclaimed—

"Where is Louise? I expected to find her here."

"She is at Mont Crystal," said Britannia.

"No, she is not, madam. I have just come from there, and felt sure of finding her here."

"You have been to Mont Crystal, then, Louis?"

"Certainly, sir. I went there just as a matter of course, with the expectation of meeting Louise."

"Well?"

"And Mrs. Armstrong's attendant met me and told me they were not at home, nor could I get any satisfaction as to *where* they were."

"Sit down, Louis, and take your tea," said Britannia. Louis took the seat indicated, and received a cup of tea from Britannia, still looking all around anxiously.

"My dear father, it is absurd to feel uneasy about this chance absence, but I *do* feel so, nevertheless. I suppose it is the effect of the mere disappointment; that there is—oh, surely *no*, there *can* be—no real cause for anxiety!"

"Nonsense! Compose yourself, and drink your tea, Louis. You cannot see your wife to-night; and that, upon the night of your return, is a serious disappointment, I grant. But you are fatigued; you will sleep it through, and to-morrow is a new day."

"But, father, it was so strange in Louise to go off on the evening I was expected home—"

"My son, she was with her *mother*, and if that lady autocrat chose to take her off on a visit, Louise could not resist her will."

"True; but then there was something strange in that woman's—Kate's, I mean—conduct towards me."

"My dear Louis, Kate was always a sulky devil; never heed her. Eat, Louis, eat, and afterwards sleep. To-morrow hurry to Mont Crystal as early as you please."

There was a self-possession, a freedom from anxiety, in the manners of both the General and Brighty that calmed the perturbation of Louis; so that, though certainly a little pensive from his disappointment, he was no longer uneasy. To shorten the hours of absence by sleep, Louis soon retired to his room.

"We were right not to tell him any bad news to-night, dear Brighty," said the General; "it would have spoiled his appetite and sleep. As it is, his hearty supper and good night's rest will make him stronger to encounter Mrs. Armstrong to-morrow morning. For the present let him rest."

They were early risers at The Isle of Rays. Indeed, upon these glorious mornings in this paradise of nature, every hour spent in sleep seemed a wanton waste of happiness. The most cheerful place in the world was the breakfast parlor at The Isle of Rays. You shall judge. It was at the angle formed by the front and side of the house. The front windows looked out upon the piazza, and commanded a view of the beautiful terrace with its graceful locust trees dropping soft shadows on the grass—the lawn, with its shaded walks, its brooks, its waterfalls, and groves—upon the arm of the river that passed between the Isle and the opposite shore—upon the green hills, rising, receding, and losing themselves in the dim and distant mountains, with their tops in the clouds, at the utmost verge of the horizon. Through these front windows also shone the morning sun, whose first beams fell upon the breakfast-table, shining dazzlingly upon the snow-white damask cloth, and kindling into splendor the tea and coffee service. The back windows of this cheerful room opened upon a garden of roses, now so fresh with morning dew that their odor filled the room. And then the birds! throwing all their souls of joy in their rapturous morning *reveille!*

Brighty was in this room very early; *Brighty in her cool* and graceful morning-dress of India muslin, moving about blithely, occupied with the thousand and one little cares and pleasures of housekeeping that not all her staff of servants could deliver her from. Now stopping to adjust upon the table some dish just brought up, now arranging, at the back windows, the branch of some rose-bush peeping through, now at the front windows, pausing, in enhanced delight, to receive the inflowing of all the divine beauty and melody around her. The door opened; Louis Stuart-Gordon entered. Brighty came forward, smiling and holding out her hand. Louis gayly and fondly carried it to his lips.

"Madam," said Louis, "how long will it be before we shall have breakfast?"

"Ah! you are in a hurry to reach Mont Crystal. You need not be, for if the family remained abroad all night, it is likely that they will not be at home until after breakfast. *We* only wait for the General."

"Madam," again said Louis, smilingly taking her hand, "do you know that I find some embarrassment in addressing you? To call you Mrs. Stuart-Gordon, is quite too formal; to call you 'mother,' would be absurd, and I dare not call you Britannia. Twenty times, *ma belle mère*, I have been on the point of asking you what I shall call you."

"Call her Brighty! call her Brighty, Louis!" said the General, who suddenly stood among them. "Call her by the pretty contraction of Britannia—Brighty—for she is the brightness of your father's house—the brightness of his heart and life;"—and the General drew her to his bosom and kissed her fondly.

"And, Louis, never raise the tips of her fingers to your lips, when her cheek is glowing so near you. Love Brighty, Louis, as Louise loves her. Brighty always carried a heart under that glowing bodice of hers."

"Come! to breakfast!" smiled Britannia, leading the way to the table.

Breakfast passed off in a gay chat. Louis soon dispatched his coffee and muffins, and, excusing himself, arose to leave the table.

"Off, Louis?" asked the General.

"Yes, sir."

"To Mont Crystal?"

"Yes, sir."

"Stay, Louis; sit down, my dear son; Brighty and myself wish to have a little conversation with you before you set out."

Louis resumed his seat, and turned his face towards his father with an attitude and expression of attention.

"We would not disturb you with any thing, unpleasant last night, Louis, because it was too late to do any thing, and because it would only have spoiled your supper and your rest—and we consider that every good meal and every good sleep is so much real gain in this world of infirmity and sullenness. For the same reason, Louis, I said nothing until you had breakfasted—and, Louis," continued the General, buttering his muffin, "I should have said nothing until you had digested your breakfast, only that your haste makes the disclosure necessary."

Louis had been growing uneasy—anxious; his looks expressed it.

"Well, sir!"

"Well, Louis—but, my son, do not look so alarmed—"

"But Louise! Louise!"

"Is well and happy, for aught I know to the contrary—"

"And—"

"At Mont Crystal with her mother of course, where I strongly suspect she was at the very moment you called there."

"Sir! my father!"

"Wait, Louis, and hear me explain. The affected reconciliation was all a stratagem on the part of Mrs. Armstrong to get Louise into her power. She shuts her up at Mont Crystal, denying admittance to every member of our family."

"My wife! What can be her reason?" exclaimed Louis, divided between astonishment and indignation.

"Ah! the reason!" repeated the General, sipping his coffee. "Who can fathom the heart and discover the motive of a bad woman for her bad acts?"

"But her ostensible reason?"

"Her ostensible reason is that the terms of the marriage contract have not been kept, inasmuch as Louise is not at the head of this establishment. This reason she gave on a visit she made me about a week since, affirming at the same time that, until myself and my wife should give up possession here, Louise should not see or speak to her husband, or any member of his family."

"The old controversy, then, sir?"

"Exactly. But her *real* reason is a concealed mortification and desire of revenge."

Here General Stuart-Gordon, for the first time, related to Louis the mutual and terrible misapprehension of himself and Mrs. Armstrong, when conversing upon matrimonial subjects.

Louis and *Britannia, despite* of the serious *matter in hand, gave way to* the ludicrousness of the scene as described by the General, and laughed heartily. The laugh did Louis good. It raised his spirits.

"Now, Louis," continued the General, "we do not consider the matter very grave. Of course this lady must give up your wife. It would be absurd to suppose that she would refuse steadily. The worst will be a rupture between the families of Mont Crystal and the Isle. That will be unpleasant, certainly. But really perfect happiness is not the lot of any human being, and, as we have so many blessings, we must reconcile ourselves to this unpleasantry, considering, meanwhile, that to be struck from the visiting list of Mrs. Armstrong is one of the lightest miseries that could happen to us. But, Brighty, my dear, you are looking gloomy. What is the matter?"

"I am thinking of Louise—poor child; that whoever gains the victory, she must be the loser; and I am wishing, if possible, that, for her sake, a permanent peace could be effected."

"I wish so, too."

"Have you any thing farther to say to me, my dear sir."

"Oh, no!—oh, no! I thought it right to put you in possession of the facts before you left; that is all. I did not, *myself*, however, consider them *very* important, except that they might have given you unnecessary anxiety."

Louis bowed, and left the room.

"You have eaten no breakfast, my dear Brighty," said the General.

"I am thinking of Louise and Louis. They love one another so fondly; and they are both so gentle—poor children; and they should be so happy; and I sympathize so much in their affection for each other, that I dread every thing that seriously threatens their peace."

"Do not feel so much, my darling. You did not seem to think this very serious till now."

"Nor did I, sir—for I did not know until now how great a humiliation she had suffered; how lasting a cause of vengeance that will be to a woman like her."

"Yet Mrs. Armstrong will not dare to brave public opinion by attempting to keep Louise from her husband."

"Mrs. Armstrong will dare do any thing she pleases to do; and Mrs. Armstrong would think it very impertinent in public opinion to sit in judgment on any of her actions. Take my knowledge of her for that."

"Yet you did not seem to know her very

well, Brighty. She deceived *you*, as all of us, in her affected reconciliation."

"I did not know her *duplicity*, sir, certainly; and it was the very last vice of which I should have suspected her. I knew her almost omnipotence of will, her immutability of purpose; but I supposed her too haughty for duplicity; and a woman like her resorting to duplicity, only proves how deeply seated her desire of vengeance is, and that alarms me the more."

"Oh! nonsense, my dear. Would you make me believe that Mrs. Armstrong is a Lady Macbeth? Come," said he, going to the table and pouring out a cup of coffee—"drink this, darling, and discover for yourself what a different aspect affairs will wear after a good cup of coffee."

Brighty's smile broke out like sunshine, chasing the shadow from her brow, as she received the cup so affectionately tendered, and sipped its contents.

"There now, you shall have your song, as usual, before you go out," she said, rising gayly, and leading the way to the parlor—"A hunting song, of course, my dear Nimrod?"

"Of course, my dear Brighty."

She played a prelude, and commenced singing an inspiring old song, of which the General was very fond—"Hark away! hark away! hark away to the downs!"—the General standing at the back of her chair, and joining in the chorus. At its conclusion she would have left the piano, but, the General telling her that he should not go out until the return of Louis, she resumed her seat, and played and sung several other pieces to fill up the time, until the horse of Louis galloped into the yard, and his step sounded in the hall. He entered, pale and agitated.

"Well, Louis?" anxiously exclaimed both the General and Brighty.

Louis threw himself into a chair before speaking; then he said—"I have been denied admittance."

"Certainly, we expected that. Indeed, we considered your visit merely as a matter of form—a preliminary necessary before making a formal demand for the restitution of your wife. Now, Louis, you are to write to Mrs. Armstrong, demanding the return of Louise."

"No," said Louis, "I shall first write to Louise, requesting her to come home."

"*Do so, then,* my son."

"*Take my word for it,* Louise will never get *'our letter,*" *said Britannia*, "unless you take some indirect and secret way of getting it into her hands."

"Zounds! It would be a relief at this moment to swear. Was ever a respectable family placed in so awkward and ridiculous a position before?"

"Louis, don't be a fool—take no more conciliatory measures at all. It is loss of time and labor. Raise the devil about the ears of that old Hecate! Get out a writ of *habeas corpus*. Sue for your marital rights."

"Sue for my marital rights! Saints and angels! my father, but you have forgotten all that is lovely in love, to dream of such a thing. Sue for my marital rights! Sue whom? *Sue Louise*, that gentle and tender Louise? Sue *her!* Yes. Heaven knows, if I could get admittance to her dear presence, how I would sue her! With bended knee and uplifted hands and eyes, I would *sue* for the privilege of passing my whole life with her, of devoting my whole life to her. That is the manner in which I would sue Louise."

"And you are right, my dear, noble-hearted Louis. You would not shock her delicacy, or wound her sensibilities, by any other suit, at least."

"May God mend the wits of all poets, I say! That's for your benefit, Louis! And for you, Miss Brighty! bright eyes—bright hair—bright lips—do *you* run away! Nay, I implore you to do so; that I may show Master Louis how long I should sit here, twisting my fingers, with my eyes on the ground, in patient widowhood!" exclaimed the General, in a half-petulant, half-caressing tone.

"No, I am much obliged to you, sir. I prefer not. Like Mrs. Armstrong, I think that all scenes are decidedly vulgar; unlike Mrs. Armstrong, I cannot defy public opinion!" Then turning to Louis, she said—"All I beg of you, Louis, is, that you will do nothing in haste. Be patient for a little while. Do not, above all things, let this matter become public through any imprudence of yours. Let the world believe for the present, that Louise is on a visit to her mother. Wait; this cannot last. It is preposterous to think that a young husband and young wife, who love each other tenderly, can be separated finally by any thing but death. All that is to be feared now, is, that this matter will get out, and reflect discredit upon the family. That would be so shocking! Guard against that, Louis? Be patient, and I will do all that I can for you. All will be well. Come, Louis, be cheerful!"

"Ah, madam! if you did but know how

this treatment of me by Louise pierces my heart!"

"I *do* know it, dear Louis; but you must not blame Louise too severely. A rule that would apply to any other woman will not apply to her. Louise has received a peculiar education. It was in consideration of that fact that I applauded your resolution of not suing otherwise than as a lover might. Louise loves you tenderly, and suffers in this separation from you, but she considers that her first duty is obedience to her mother. *That* duty has been impressed on her mind from her infancy up. She knows nothing of her duty as a wife; *that* has never been taught her."

"But one would suppose," said Louis, "that her natural instincts would enlighten her."

"Dear Louis, her mother has taught her to consider her mere *instincts* as so many temptations of the evil one. Louise has been taught but one of the Ten Commandments, 'Honor thy father and thy mother'—but not 'Love and honor thy husband;' she knows nothing of that. The whole of the life of Louise has been spent in learning and practising one lesson—filial honor and obedience. It is her idiosyncrasy—her monomania. All her life she has been in the hands of her mother, and that mother has used that time in obtaining and confirming an almost omnipotent power over the heart of her child. And at her mother's command she will renounce her husband, although her heart were to break in the renunciation!"

"But this is unnatural! monstrous!"

"Yes, it is unnatural—monstrous—but it is the effect of education; and you know the all-powerful influence of education. One educated in a particular belief, creed—be it ever so far from right reason—will die, if necessary, for that creed! Some of the gentlest, tenderest, and most timid women that have ever lived, have suffered themselves to be hanged, burned, or torn by wild horses, rather than renounce some point of duty in which *they* believed, no matter how far from the truth it might be. So with Louise. She will endure all suffering rather than disobey her mother, since that is her religion."

"Louis! get her back home; *get her home.* She is young yet, and you can teach her a new creed. I would not give a cent for a young man who could not induce his young bride to believe that the stars were all angels, or any thing else he pleased. Only get her home—by fair means or foul," exclaimed *the General.*

"Hush-sh-sh!" said Brighty, laying one hand on his lips, and throwing the other arm affectionately over his shoulder. "Do not urge Louis to any such a step. You do not know Louise as well as I do. She is morbidly sensitive—very frail and nervous. Any violent controversy between her husband and her mother would kill Louise."

"And yet you bade me wait and hope. Oh, madam, was not that a mockery?" asked Louis, turning reproachfully towards Britannia.

"No, Louis, I am incapable of mockery. I advised you not to shock and alarm Louise by any hasty or violent measures. And I told you all I know of her own and her mother's peculiarities, that you may know that violence will do no sort of good, but all harm. And I entreated, and still entreat, you to have patience—to take time to reflect. I will think for you, and do all in my power to bring matters to a happy issue—use only prudent and conciliatory means at first—and all *must* be well."

With a heavy sigh, Louis took his hat and left the room. General Stuart-Gordon, shaking his head dubiously, soon arose and followed him.

Four days passed away, during which Louis had written both to Mrs. Armstrong and to Louise. These letters might as well have been dropped into a well, for any reply they received. Sunday came. Mrs. Armstrong was a regular attendant at church.

"I shall see Louise at morning service," said Louis, and he hurried off to church.

The Armstrong pew was empty, and remained empty during the whole service.

A month elapsed, during which Louis had presented himself many times at Mont Crystal, and had been constantly denied admittance—a month, during which he had written and written, again and again, to Louise and to Mrs. Armstrong, without producing the slightest effect. By no token could he be sure that they received his letters. They gave no sign, not even by returning them. Mrs. Armstrong maintained a stern but inflexible silence. He attended church regularly, but never met Louise or Mrs. Armstrong there. General Stuart-Gordon wrote to Mrs. Armstrong. His letter also seemed to have fallen into a grave. Then the General called at Mont Crystal, and was told the ladies were not at home. Britannia also had made a call with no better success. Thus two months passed away.

BOOK III.

CHAPTER I.

MONT CRYSTAL.

O'er that house there hangs a solemn gloom ;
That step falls timid in each gorgeous room,
Vast, sumptuous, dreary as some Eastern pile,
Where mutes keep watch—a home without a smile.
The New Timon.

How many a sleepless form has no other watcher than the patient moon! One quiet night, about the last of October, near midnight, the moon arose, and as it ascended towards the zenith, shed a flood of silver radiance over the river, The Isle of Rays, and the lofty mansion of Mont Crystal. Near the dawn of day, stealing through the front windows of Mont Crystal, the moonbeams looked into that same front bed-chamber, once described as the summer sleeping-room of Mrs. Armstrong. This chamber contained two bedsteads—a large tent bedstead, with its white dimity curtains down, and a little cot, covered with a white Marseilles counterpane. This little white cot stood between the tent bedstead and the front windows. The moonbeams, coming through the window, fell upon the cot and upon the wan face of Louise, glistening upon the tear-drops that hung upon her eyelashes. Here maciated hands were clasped above her head. She lay so still, and looked so white, that but for the glistening tear-drops, and the occasional convulsion of her bosom, she might have been supposed to be asleep or dead. At last, a slight movement from the tent bedstead startled her. She unclasped her hands, and listened. The noise, as of some one turning in the bed, was repeated. Louise raised upon her elbow, and listened again attentively. She now heard something between a hem and a groan, as of one waking up. Now she murmured softly—

"Mother, dear, are you awake ?"

"*Yes, Louise !*" proceeded from the curtains.

"*Oh ! I am so glad.* I have not slept to-night, mother. I have counted every hour the clock has struck. I have waited for you to wake, so long."

"You have had a sleepless night, my child! Why did you not touch the bell, and summon Kate to give you a narcotic ? What has been the matter ? Nothing but your usual nervousness, I hope ?"

"Mother, I could not sleep for joy and for sorrow."

"Strange paradox, that! what do you mean, Louise ?"

Louise slipped softly out of bed, and going to the side of the tent bedstead, and putting aside the curtains, stooped and kissed her mother, dropping a tear upon her face. Then kneeling by her side, she took her hand and covered it with kisses.

"Mamma, I must return to Louis ! *indeed* I must, mamma, if he will take me back ! Indeed I must, mamma, if he were twenty times a traitor !"

"Hey ! what ! how ! what is all this wretched nonsense, now ?"

"Mamma, I shall be a mother soon !" said Louise, in a voice between timidity and tenderness.

"WHAT !" exclaimed the lady, raising upon her elbow, and gathering her black brows into an awful frown—"WHAT !"

"God has blessed me ! I, *too*, shall be a mother, dear mamma ! Oh ! mamma, kiss me, now that I have told you !"

"It is not true ! It cannot be true !" exclaimed Mrs. Armstrong, still glaring at her daughter.

"Mamma, it is *so ;* and I must return to Louis—*indeed* I must, mamma !"

"To a man whose whole heart is given to his mistress ?"

"If it be so, it is dreadful, mamma, but I cannot help it. He *does* love me a little. Any how, I know I love him entirely ; and, bankrupt that I am, I could be happier, even in his divided affection, than I am, severed from him here. And, oh, mother! being separated from him under these circumstances, gives me a feeling of degradation—of shame!"

"I do not wonder at it, if these circumstances were as you fancy, Miss Armstrong."

"Oh, mamma! do not call me 'Miss Armstrong' any longer, I beg of you; for, although as you say I am but a mere child, yet I am *not* 'Miss Armstrong;' and to hear you call me so, mother, covers my face with burning blushes."

"Oh! beg your pardon, *Mrs. Louis Stuart-Gordon;* I will try to bear in mind your dignity for the future."

"Mamma, can you not call me Louise? Speak to me kindly, dear mamma."

"I am not sufficiently well pleased with you, ma'am, to address you so familiarly."

"Mamma, how have I given you offence?"

"By the subject of your conversation. Now, let me hear no more ridiculous nonsense about returning to that young scapegrace, nor the other miserable shift-about—pshaw! fudge! stuff! you ought to be ashamed of yourself to have such fancies."

"It is not fancy, it is fact, mamma."

"Silence! *hush!* not a *word* more of this, I command you, Louise. It is false! *false!* you are too young—far too young. You should blush at such imaginings."

"It is not imagination, mamma;" persisted Louise, with a tender earnestness.

"Hush! I command you! Never dare to hint this subject to me, or to any one else, at the peril of my grave displeasure. Shameful! But you are really out of health. You are ill and nervous, and so, of course, full of idle fancies. You are too much confined. You do not take exercise enough. You must go out more. You shall ride on horseback. Nothing is better for low spirits than hard riding on a trotting horse. Come, you shall have your first ride to-morrow. We will see if we cannot cure you of these nervous fancies. Now, return to bed, and try to get some sleep. Don't you know you are taking cold, by kneeling here with bare feet? Go to bed. Stay! come back a moment."

"Well, mamma?"

"This is a *very* absurd fancy of yours, Louise! Now, I charge you, do not betray your folly to any one. Do not speak of this conceit of yours to a soul. It would subject you to ridicule."

"I shall be silent, dear mamma."

And Louise crept back to bed—"but not to *sleep.*"

It was a glorious autumn morning that rose upon the world that day. Mrs. Armstrong always arose with the sun precisely. This morning, as soon as its earliest beams, glancing between the half-closed shutters, gilded the opposite wall, Mrs. Armstrong was up, and arrayed in an ample flannel wrapper, sitting before her tall dressing-glass, while Kate Jumper stood behind her, combing out her abundant long black hair, that was still beautiful, though slightly mixed with silver. Mrs. Armstrong glanced from time to time upon Louise, who still lay extended upon her white cot, perfectly motionless, her eyes closed, her slender fingers interlocked upon her pale brow—occasionally a spasmodic sigh, agitating her bosom, breaking from her lips.

"What do you think of that child, Kate?" asked the lady, looking searchingly in the face of her attendant.

"Well, madam, I think she is—indeed all the women about the house know she is—"

"*In bad health!*" said the lady, emphatically, and looking sternly and threateningly at her attendant.

"Yes, madam, of course, just as *you* say, in bad health."

"Listen to me! She is out of spirits, and she neglects her toilet sadly—more than I choose that my daughter shall. I shall dismiss her maid, and do *you* take her place, and superintend the dressing of your young lady. Do not permit her to go about as loosely and carelessly arrayed as has been her custom of late. See that she wears her stays; do you hear?"

"Yes, madam, I hear and understand."

"Hear and *literally obey.* Do not trouble your understanding with more than the literal command."

Another glance at Louise found her gentle eyes now open, and calmly turned on her mother.

"It is time to rise, my daughter. You are to take a ride this morning, directly after breakfast. Kate will dress you," said the lady; "and, Louise, I insist upon your paying more attention to your personal appearance. Kate has my orders." And the lady, whose turban was now arranged, took up her bunch of keys, and marched from the room.

One thing Mrs. Armstrong wished to avoid in these rides—that was, the possibility of a rencounter with Louis, or, what was worse, with that old "Island Seal," as she called the General. To avoid such a rencounter by a keen vigilance, and, in the event of a chance meeting, to prevent Louise from "falling into the hands of the enemy," Mrs. Armstrong, who was an excellent equestrian, determined to accompany her daughter.

"We will go down to see Zoe. Since the girl knows her place, and does not presume on our former notice of her to appear at Mont Crystal, we can show her some kindness—can engage her to do some work for us," said the lady, as soon as she and her daughter were in their saddles. And whipping her horse into a smart trot, she set out for the Dovecote, attended by a mounted servant to open the gates. Arrived at the summit of the hill, and before beginning to descend the narrow bridle-path leading down into the glen where was situated the Dovecote, Mrs. Armstrong took out her glass, and threw a sweeping glance over the ground that lay stretched down before them. Apparently satisfied by her survey, they began to descend the path. They arrived at the cottage without meeting with any one.

The external appearance of the Dovecote was certainly improved. The yard was a wilderness of roses. The windows were open, and rare and beautiful exotics in flower-pots sat upon the sills; they filled the air with their fragrance. Mrs. Armstrong looked around with surprise, and Louise with delight, as they alighted from their saddles, and passed through the little wicket up the walk.

The inside of the cot was as much improved as the exterior. Pale pink gingham curtains at the windows shed a delicate rose-colored light through the room. Zoe's own carpet, fresh as ever, was upon the floor. A few choice pictures, all of cheerful or of loving subjects, were on the wall. A small mahogany bookcase, filled with books, and surmounted by a little plaster-cast statuette, stood between the rose-curtained, flower-filled windows. More than all—the *idol* of the little housewise—a a nice mahogany workstand, with two folding leaves and two drawers, and surmounted by a workbox, completely furnished, stood near the corner of the hearth. Zoe, neatly dressed in white muslin, sat at this workstand in a little rocking-chair without arms, her feet resting upon a little embroidered footstool. On her lap lay a piece of work, in which she seemed to take great delight. It was an infant's slip she was embroidering. Zoe was humming a lullaby tune to some imaginary baby, and looking the picture of content.

Did you expect that Zoe was heart-broken? Zoe was too much of a child and a housewife to break her heart for what had happened to her, after her first fit of crying. There was not a single capillary vein of tragedy in all Zoe's happy organization. She perfectly understood that the coffee-pot must boil through all sorts of troubles. *Governments* might be subverted, but *supper* must be got. *Kings* might be decapitated, but *clothes* must be cut, and so Zoe unconsciously sung the imaginary baby to sleep, while she wrought mimic heart's-ease and rose-buds in the border of the cambric slip.

On the opposite side of the work-table, in a large easy chair, sat the old schoolmaster. He had grown fat, and was clothed in a cool, loose white linen jacket and trowsers, and his face wore an air of celestial calmness. He was playing with two beautiful, frolicksome tortoise-shell kittens, that continually leaped about him, or climbing upon his shoulders, licking his hands, or nestling in his bosom. It was plain that the old man had reached his second childhood, and that it was as innocent and as happy as his first. There was not a single care, or fear, or doubt, on that divinely serene countenance—divinely serene, except when changed by a laugh, as glad as ever rang from his boyhood's lips. Such a laugh had just rung out. The tortoise-shell kittens had made a simultaneous spring to reach his back, and tumbling over each other, had rolled upon the floor, and the old man had just laughed aloud—when the door opened, and Mrs. Armstrong and Louise appeared.

Zoe laid down her little slip upon the stand, and came forward, courtesying, and setting chairs. Mrs. Armstrong, with a condescending nod to the schoolmaster, seated herself. But Louise turned and tenderly embraced Zoe, while she said, with a gentle smile—

"Why, Zoe, have you not been to Mont Crystal of late? Didn't you know, Zoe, that nothing that could happen to you, without your own fault, could make any change in my feelings towards you? Oh! Zoe?" she said, sinking her voice to a low whisper, "don't you know that I would have hastened to you as soon as ever I got home—*if I had been permitted?*"

"I know you would have done so, Mrs. Stuart-Gordon," said Zoe, pressing her hand.

"Why don't you call me Louise?"

"Circumstances have so changed with me, young lady, that I must remember my own position, lest others should be obliged to remind me of it," said Zoe, with something of gentle dignity in her manner. Then, still holding the hand of Louise, with the other hand she gracefully indicated the chair, and seated her in it.

Mrs. Armstrong was endeavoring to converse with the old schoolmaster. Louise and Zoe were seated at the work-table.

"I am glad to see you looking so happy and well, dear Zoe."

"Why should I *not* be? What is changed, except in name? Oh! I cried at first, though! Oh! I cried my eyes out, nearly! I thought I should be cast out! I thought that all my friends, whom I loved so dearly, would abandon me. But, ah! it has been so different! My friends have changed indeed—but to greater kindness. Gertrude—Miss Lion, I should say—who used to treat me very capriciously, sometimes petting, sometimes abusing me—Miss Lion treats me with the affection of a sister; and Brighty—I mean Mrs. General Stuart-Gordon—oh! she has been an angel to me and to my adopted father, there. Look around upon this room, madam! all this cheerful beauty is her work—her bounty—although she conceals it all under the veil of a liberal pay for the sewing I do for her. Ah! surely never prosperity blessed a worthier one than that lady."

Louise was turning over and examining the baby-slip with curiosity and interest.

"Do you sew for any other family except that of the Isle, Zoe?"

"No; Mrs. Stuart-Gordon gives me as much sewing as I can possibly do, and pays me most liberally. Then she always *gives* me a great deal, and with her true native delicacy, gives me only the work of her own hands, or the produce of her own garden or conservatory. Look at those pictures on the walls; they were painted by her. This little ottoman I use when sewing was worked by her. Look at those tea-roses and heliotropes in the pretty porcelain flower-pots in the window—they were sent from her conservatory. And the variety of roses in the yard were all sent from her garden of roses at the back of the Island breakfast-room."

"Dear Brighty! she is an angel; but, indeed, dear Zoe, my *will* to serve you was as good as hers."

"I know it, my dear young lady."

Louise was still turning over the little slip—measuring the little waist—running her fingers into the little sleeves. Zoe now observed her occupation, and forgetting her *purposed reserve, and smiling* and blushing, she bent her head to the ear of Louise, and whispered with a girlish confidence—

"Do you know, Louise, that notwithstanding all that has happened to me, I only need one thing to make me completely happy."

"And what is that, Zoe?"

"A baby! Oh! I do want to find a baby so bad! Ever since I left off my doll, I have thought, if I only had a live baby to dress and nurse, I should be the happiest of mortals."

"Then suppose you should go out as a nurse," said Louise, half jestingly.

"No, that would never suit me, never! I have been mistress of my own house ever since I was nine years old, and I could not live in any body else's," said the little housekeeper, with gentle pride. "No, Louise, I would like to find a baby under a tree, or on the door-step, some fine day—some dear little lost baby, that I could take care of; dear me, how I should love it! They say that every human being's eyes and hopes are fixed on some "far-off, unattained," and unattainable good! My eyes are fixed on a baby! and, please the loving angels, I will some day pick up one of the Lord's lost little ones, and raise it for my own, and it shall call me mother, and then I shall not care a straw if I *am* an old maid! But I say, Louise," added she, laughing slyly, "is it not dismal, when we young girls can no longer cheat ourselves with nursing dolls?"

Louise smiled sadly, and asked, still examining the little slip—

"Are you making this for your Utopian baby?"

"N—no—that is for Brighty—I mean Mrs. Stuart-Gordon!"

"Ha! what?"

"Certainly; here"—continued Zoe, drawing out a large work-basket from under the table—"look at all the sweet pretty little things!"

The two girls were soon quite absorbed in examining tiny caps, bibs, slips, &c. While thus engaged, Louise stooped, and whispered in the ear of Zoe this question—

"How is your father, Zoe? He looks better and happier than I ever saw him; happier, indeed, than any one I see anywhere; yet there is something strange about him—what is it?"

"Listen, Louise! I will tell you all about it. He has passed an innocent and a beneficent life; oh! *has* he not?"

"Indeed he has! from all that we have heard of him, and from all that we have observed ourselves."

"Yet a life full of toil and privation."

"Yes."

"His life has been like a cloudy day, that ends in a clearing up at set of sun—a sunset glorious as the gates of Heaven. When the revelation of my true position was suddenly made to him, the shock, together with his apprehension of the most terrible results, shook his mind and body nearly to dissolution. For months he was metamorphosed—unrecognizable—*mad* almost. When we got to The Lair, Brutus, by pledging himself to avert the worst consequences that might fall upon my head, tranquillized him; but he did not recover his normal state of mind; he fell into a sort of abstraction, that lasted all the time of our stay at The Lair. After our return to this cottage, he began to rouse up from this dull abstraction, and awake, not to what he ever had been since I knew him, but to a sort of gladness and boyishness. And he has grown fat and fair, and there he is—the happy child-angel that you see him. It is profane to call this beautiful emancipation of this guileless spirit *dotage*—it is 'second childhood' indeed!—a state very near beatification! Oh, Louise! nothing has ever revealed Heaven to me with so much power as this old man's so-called 'dotage.' The dotage of a life innocent as his has been—what is it but the blissful trance of a spirit standing on the confines of both worlds—communing with both, bearing from the one a glory that enlightens the other! He seems to me always an angel, or a child. Listen, Louise! While we sit here together—I with my needle, he with his pets—sometimes he lets them run off, and closes his eyes, and sinks into a sort of happy abstraction, a beautiful calm diffuses itself over his countenance, which anon grows brighter and brighter, until it seems to radiate light and beauty, as an angel's; and I pause from my work, and gaze with awe, until my faith in Heaven reaches certainty. And presently he will awake from that abstraction, and begin to look around, and chat with me, and play with his pets, and laugh as gleefully as a child at the merest trifle. Yet there is no folly, no imbecility, not the least in all this—it is always the innocent joy of the child, or the inspiration of the angel."

Mrs. Armstrong, while apparently occupied with the old man, had lost no part of this conversation; and her brow had grown very dark at those parts that had concerned Britannia. The old man now arose, and approached the girls, and looked wistfully into the face of Louise; then he stretched forth his hand, and laying it on her head, blessed her. Then he stooped, and said confidentially to Zoe, pointing to Mrs. Armstrong.

"Don't let her come and sit by me again, Zoe. She has made me feel cold all over, and made my eyes dim. And this little child, Zoe," he said, laying his hand on the head of Louise, "this poor little chilled blue-pale child, she must not stay near her, or she will be frost-bitten, as the flowers are, and die as the flowers do."

"What does he say about his flowers?" asked Mrs. Armstrong, now approaching the table.

"He says they will be frost-bitten, if exposed to the cold," answered Zoe.

The old man shrunk gently away at the lady's approach, passed around the table, holding by it, and tottered back to his seat.

"Have you engaged this girl to make up your autumn dresses, Louise?"

"No, mamma; Zoe has as much work as she can do," replied Louise.

"Then we need not delay our return," said Mrs. Armstrong.

Louise arose to take leave of Zoe, and found an opportunity of saying to her—

"I have no room, not a nook or corner, at Mont Crystal, for my private use, Zoe—I share my mother's apartments; but if I ever should get back to The Isle of Rays, a spare room there shall always be at your service, Zoe; and in the mean time, dear Zoe, I shall be very happy to see you at Mont Crystal, if you can take any pleasure in seeing me always in the company of others."

They then took leave of the schoolmaster and left the cottage.

Remounting their horses, and followed by their attendant, Mrs. Armstrong and Louise entered the bridle-path leading through the glen and up the hill.

This path was very narrow, with a high, thick wood on both sides. They rode in single file—Mrs. Armstrong first, Louise next, and their servant behind. The lady had nearly reached the top of the hill, when a lady and gentleman on horseback, appeared suddenly in sight, riding down the path, meeting them.

It was Britannia, in high beauty, attired in an elegant dark-blue velvet riding-habit and cap, with a floating white plume, and mounted on a jet-black horse. She was followed by Louis Stuart-Gordon, looking pale and haggard, in his usual dress of simple black, and mounted on his dark-bay horse.

There was no avoiding the meeting now. Mrs. Armstrong and her party paused and drew aside for the new-comers to pass.

Mrs. Armstrong drew up her majestic figure to its loftiest height, gathered her dark brows into an awful frown, and looked sternly and straight ahead.

Louise grew deadly pale, dropped her head upon her bosom and her eyes upon the ground.

Britannia passed first. She threw a glance of indignation at the haughty countenance of Mrs. Armstrong, and turned a look full of pitying affection upon the pale face of Louise.

Louis came next. Lifting his cap from his head, and bowing low as his saddle, he held it thus until he had passed them. They rode down the hill.

With a frowning brow and curling lip, Mrs. Armstrong whipped up her horse, just as the servant sprang before her and caught Louise, who was falling from her saddle.

"Take her before you on the horse. Take her before you on the horse. Fly with her to Mont Crystal! Quick, quick, quick!" exclaimed Mrs. Armstrong, who, by a rapid glance, had perceived that Louis, looking back, had seen Louise swoon, and was now spurring his horse rapidly up the hill towards them.

The man raised the fainting girl, and fled with her towards Mont Crystal.

Louis Stuart-Gordon overtook Mrs. Armstrong, who, keeping in the middle of the path, would not suffer him to pass her.

He addressed her with respectful courtesy, requesting her to give way, that he might ride on and see Louise.

Mrs. Armstrong sat straight up in the saddle, looked straight on before her, and rode leisurely, without replying.

He spoke to her again, earnestly, and inquired after the health of his wife.

Mrs. Armstrong did not answer.

He argued with her, entreated her.

Mrs. Armstrong persevered in a stern silence, until they had reached the gates of Mont Crystal, when, turning to him, she said—

"Sir, my daughter is in fine health and spirits. You need give yourself no impertinent uneasiness about her."

She passed the gates. They clanged to behind her, leaving Louis reining up his horse without.

"*And Louise is dying*—slowly dying! I know it!" he exclaimed, as he galloped madly back to The Isle of Rays.

The waiter who went to summon Louis to breakfast the next morning found him in high delirium.

The grief, suspense, anxiety of the last two months, acting upon a singularly delicate and susceptible organization, had now brought a crisis, and Louis Stuart-Gordon was raving in a brain-fever.

CHAPTER II.

THE SOLITARY.

> Go—be sure of my *love*—by thy treason forgiven;
> Of my *prayers*—by the blessings they win thee from
> Heaven!
> Of my *grief*—guess the length of the sword by the
> sheath's;
> By the silence of *life*—more pathetic than death's.
> Go—be clear of that day!
>
> *Eliz. B. Browning.*

"Well, Kate!"

"Well, madam, I went to the bridge, leading from the river shore to The Isle of Rays, as you commanded me, and there I waited until old Seraphina passed, as I expected."

"Go on."

"Well, madam, as you told me to find out all I could without going on to the premises, or asking questions, I thought there was no other way of discovering what was passing at the mansion, than by picking a quarrel with her; so I stooped down, and pretended to be looking for maninosies; placing myself directly in her path as she had to go by me, I tripped her up—she fell upon her face—"

"Well?"

"She scrambled up, with her nose and mouth bleeding, foaming with fury, and swore—"

"Well, well—go on, will you—what did she say?"

"She said—'If you and your missis don't go to de debil, I don't see use ob habbin any debil to go to! and I thinks de Lord might's well turn him out ob office.'"

"Silence—insolent! I do not ask you for these petty details. In one word, now, what did you learn? What is the state of Louis Stuart-Gordon's health?"

"Madam, Mr. Stuart-Gordon is still extremely ill, and no hopes are entertained of his recovery."

"Humph! The comfort is, that Louise and her child are his heirs—that is, if the latter should live after. I am almost sorry now—one can never tell what turns affairs are going to take," muttered the lady to herself.

"Madam?"

"Hold your tongue. I am not talking to you."

The mulatto clenched her teeth.

"Well—this other story about the woman?"

"About Mrs. Stuart-Gordon, madam?"

"Yes."

"It is all true, madam. Seraph told me so, shaking her fist in my face, in triumph, that you might kill Mr. Louis, but that his loss might be replaced—that an heir would not be wanting to The Isle of Rays."

"Well?"

"I tossed up my head and told her certainly *not*, for though Mr. Louis might die, Mrs. Louis was—"

"*Wretch!* you did not tell her *that?*"

"Pardon, madam, pardon; but could I stand there and see *her* triumphing over me?"

"But you told her a *lie*—a *lie*—that you are to contradict to-morrow. Do you understand me?" asked the lady, fixing her severe eyes sternly upon her attendant.

"Madam, I will do so; but there is one thing I should tell you."

"Tell it."

"The morning upon which Mrs. Stuart-Gordon and Mr. Louis encountered yourself and Mrs. Louis upon the hill, in returning from the Dovecote, it seems that Mr. Louis, as well as Mrs. Stuart-Gordon, observed Mrs. Louis's ill looks, and saw her faint; and that from that circumstance, the family at The Isle of Rays have inferred that Mrs. Louis is grieving herself to death at separation from her husband. Now, madam, I wished to give Mrs. Louis's delicate appearance another cause. I could not bear to have them think that our young lady ever threw away a thought upon them. Thus I had two motives for telling the—"

"*Falsehood!*" finished Mrs. Armstrong, with a determined look.

"Yes, madam; of course, the *falsehood*."

"And thus I have two motives for compeling Louise to go to this grand ball: first, that they may not flatter themselves that Louise is *breaking her* heart. Ha, ha, ha! They will *no longer do so when* they hear of her dancing *at a ball while* her husband is dying. And my second motive is, that the story told by this stupid Kate may be tacitly contradicted," thought the lady; then raising her voice, she exclaimed—

"Kate."

"Well, madam?"

"My daughter, as yet, knows nothing of the illness of Mr. Stuart-Gordon, nor will I have her mind disturbed by it. Therefore, be silent upon that subject, in her presence."

"Yes, madam."

"To-morrow, contradict that story you told the old gossip; and be sure to tell her that Mrs. Louis is well and cheerful, and will attend, as usual, the annual ball at the Prince's school."

"Yes, madam; I understand."

"You are not to say that Mrs. Louis is ignorant of Mr. Louis's illness."

"Oh! no, madam—by no means! of course not."

"I think now that you perfectly comprehend me?"

"Perfectly, madam."

"Kate, I have promised to leave you free. If you will deserve it at my hands, I will leave you comfortably provided for. If you do not merit this—"

"Georgy!"

"Exactly."

In the early part of this true story, I had occasion to mention a collegiate school at Peakville, called the Prince of Wales Academy, and sometimes, for brevity, the Prince's School. This was a sort of smaller college, consisting of a president, four to six professors, and five or six hundred pupils, collected from all parts of the South. The president and professors of this Academy were mostly from New England, but the greater part of the pupils were from the Southern States. Such of these professors as were unmarried lived at the Academy, but those who had families occupied private dwellings in the village. Many of the pupils boarded at the Academy, some with the families of the professors, and a few with private families in the village or neighborhood. The ages of these young men ranged from fourteen to twenty-five years, and their character as a class ranked high—nay, "a student of the Prince of Wales Academy" was another name for integrity, honor, generosity, gallantry, chivalry, magnanimity—in short, in that neighborhood "a student" was a compendium of all the social and chivalric virtues. In that respect, the Prince of Wales Academy was different—

yes! diametrically opposite to any school or college I ever heard of, before or since. I do not know *how* it was, but *so* it was. The first two weeks of every December they held an annual festival, at the close of which the school broke up for the Christmas holidays. This festival, for its variety of delightful entertainments, its gayety, and its continued length, might be called a carnival. The parents and guardians of the pupils came even for hundreds of miles to be present on the occasion, and remained until the close of the ceremonies. Let this be made known for the credit of hospitable "Old Virginia," that, wherever the *pupils* boarded, the parents or guardians were received and entertained during their stay as *guests*. The village and neighborhood of the Prince of Wales Academy would be as much crowded as a fashionable watering-place at the height of the season, or as Washington city during the long session of Congress. During the first week of the "carnival," (I prefer to borrow that term,) the days were spent in examinations of all the pupils through all their studies. This was a great solemnity, carried on by the professors in the presence of the hundreds assembled in the chapel of the institution. The evenings were spent in exhibitions, recitations, declamations, theatricals, &c.; and there was no telling how many enthusiastic boys became stage-struck, or fired with desires to become orators, actors, or preachers, or how many sensitive girls lost their hearts when gazing upon some handsome young aspirant for histrionic or oratorical honors, while spouting Shakspeare or Sheridan! The second week, the first three days were devoted to the distribution of the premiums, and the last four to public breakfasts, great dinners, suppers, and dancing parties. The grand ball was always given upon the last day of the festival, and followed by a public breakfast the next morning, after which the company dispersed, the students returning with their friends to spend the holidays, and the people of the neighborhood going quietly home to keep Christmas on their own farms. The season of the annual festival now approached. It was the 1st of December. Already the village and neighborhood were filling with strangers, and the solemnities of the examination had commenced. The family at Mont Crystal and at The Isle of Rays had received tickets of invitation. Of course, the Stuart-Gordons decided at once not to appear in public at such a time, and under such circumstances.

Mrs. Armstrong resolved to confront the world, as well to mortify the Island family as to show her haughty defiance of public sentiment. Mrs. Armstrong signified her wishes to her daughter. At first Louise was surprised and distressed at the proposition, or rather the command, but soon reflecting that she might meet Louis there—that there he had been educated—that there he had always appeared—and that there he would almost certainly be,—Louise cheerfully consented to go.

The evening of the ball came. Louise was dressed with great care. She wore a white gauze over a rose-colored satin, with open and falling sleeves. Her fair arms and neck were bare, and adorned with pearl necklace and bracelets. Her hair was arranged in madonna bands, and encircled by a wreath of white roses. White kid gloves and white satin slippers completed her toilet. These two delicate colors, rose and white, suited the fair and soft beauty of the young woman, and never had Louise appeared so lovely.

Mrs. Armstrong wore a garnet-colored velvet—her still rich black hair banded on her temples, and surmounted by a white gauze turban adorned with a bird of Paradise.

At eight o'clock precisely, they entered the carriage, attended by Kate Jumper, and were driven to the Prince of Wales Academy.

The halls, saloons, and lecture-rooms of the Academy were converted into dancing, card, and supper-rooms. The studies of the grave professors were metamorphosed into ladies' and gentlemen's dressing-rooms. The president himself was master of ceremonies, the masters were managers of the ball, and the most elegant of the young men stood in crowds at the doors, and out upon the piazzas, to wait on the young ladies as they were driven up in their carriages.

These things belong to the past, they have gone out of fashion along with ruffled shirts, knee breeches, buckles, hooped petticoats, plumes, and farthingales—gone out of fashion, yet not quite. Some of this old-school, chivalric gallantry *may* be found in the interior and older counties of Maryland and Virginia. We digress.

It took Mrs. Armstrong's carriage just two hours to reach the Prince's School. It was consequently ten o'clock when the carriage drew up before the vast illuminated front of the building. A crowd of carriages filled the court-yard—a crowd of young men waited on the piazzas—a flood of light blazed from the hundred front windows—and thunders of music shook the air. Mrs. Armstrong's carriage, winding its way among the crowd, pulled up close by the steps of the piazza, immediately in front of the principal entrance.

Several young men started forward to open the door and let down the steps; but, on recognizing the carriage, drew back—some with frowning brows and scornful lips—some with flushed cheeks and downcast eyes. Not one advanced even to hand the ladies from the carriage. The coachman—an unprecedented thing in that neighborhood—had to get down from his seat to assist the ladies in alighting. Arrogant as she was, Mrs. Armstrong's brow crimsoned, as she gave her hand to her coachman and alighted, to see a crowd of youths standing still, with averted or downcast eyes, any of whom, six months ago, would have felt but too highly honored in rendering her family the slightest attention. Throwing a sweeping glance of scorn over the assemblage, and gathering the ample folds of her velvet mantle around her, she threw back her head, and passed on with a haughty and regnant step.

Louise dropped her eyes as she appeared at the carriage door. *Then* a young man advanced from among the crowd, and held out his hand to assist her in alighting. Louise just raised her eyes an instant to the pale and haggard face, and lightly touched the cold and emaciated hand extended to assist her, as she sprang lightly past, and joined her mother. Then turning her head to look again at the gentleman who had assisted her, she uttered a half-stifled cry, full of bitterest anguish, and fell fainting into the arms of her mother.

The coachman sprang forward at Mrs. Armstrong's call, and receiving Louise from her arms, bore her into the house, followed by the lady, and carried her up stairs into one of the ladies' dressing-rooms. She was laid on the settee. Several ladies—some of them strangers from different parts of the State—hurried to her aid; but Mrs. Armstrong coldly declined their proffers of assistance, and dispatched the coachman to hasten the arrival of her own confidential attendant, Kate. The mulatto soon entered, and with her help, Louise soon opened her eyes.

"Oh, mamma, was he living or *dead?*" were the first words faltered forth by the blue lips of Louise.

"*Collect yourself*, my daughter."

"But oh, mamma, that—that *spectre* was Louis!"

"Go down stairs, Kate, and bring me a glass of wine," said the lady, still bathing the head of Louise.

"Oh, mother, to meet Louis so again—again! So changed I did not recognize him at first—so changed! Oh, mother, when we met him on the hill, and he passed *me* with a gentlemanly bow—bowing to the pommel of his saddle—holding his hat off till he passed me—*me*, his wife, his own Louise—I thought the spasm of my heart had killed me! But now—but now—to meet him again so unexpectedly; to have him bow and coldly hand me from the carriage—*me*, his own Louise—for *charity, mother*, because no one else would do it; to see him looking so ill; to merely touch his hand as I sprang past him—that emaciated hand—which, had I recognized it, I should have covered with tears."

"You are excited, phrenzied, Louise; here, drink some cold water."

"How long does it take a heart to break, mother?—how long? Oh, it is such a slow—slow—slow death! between the pangs there are so many intervals of ease, or forgetfulness, or *idiocy!*"

The dressing-room was now quite deserted, the ladies having all completed their toilets, and gone down into the ball-room.

Weeping and talking will generally exhaust a fit of grief, leaving a sort of weary calmness. Cold water is a great sedative. Under all these influences, Louise, after a little, became quiet.

At this moment, Kate entered with a glass of wine.

"It will not do," said the lady; "besides, I have changed my mind about giving it to her, for, though wine may raise the spirits of a dull person, it will make the grief of a sorrowing one too eloquent. No, if you please, bring her a cup of very strong coffee; there is no mistake in the effects of that."

Kate again left the room. Mrs. Armstrong bolted the door; and then assisting her daughter to stand up, she arranged the folds of her dress, smoothed her hair, replaced her wreath, and going to one of the dressing-tables, took a pot of rouge left there by one of the ladies, and delicately touched the lily cheeks of her daughter. Then she made her sit down and wait for the coffee, while she went herself and unfastened the door. Kate soon after returned with the fragrant stimulant, and noticing her young lady, the unsuspecting woman exclaimed, "Why, I do declare she is better, madam. She looks better than I have seen her look for a long time. Her cheeks are as red as roses. Indeed, she is quite beautiful!"

Louise drank the coffee—a large cup of very strong coffee—and then rising, took her mother's arm, and they went down stairs.

It is a very awkward thing in *this* country for ladies to enter public assemblies without the escort of gentlemen. Mrs. Armstrong had frequently preferred to go to such places attended only by her servants, but she had always found upon the spot many gentlemen who were proud to render her service.

Now, however, remembering the coldness of her reception at the door, she had many misgivings that herself and her daughter would be obliged to enter and pass down the ballroom unattended. That would be mortifying! She had expected to have to defy public *sentiment*, but not to encounter public scorn and indignity. However, there was no retreat now. She drew the arm of her daughter within her own, elevated her haughty head, and prepared to enter the saloon with a majestic mien. The room was blazing with light, and thundering with music, and filled to suffocation nearly, with splendid company. As she sailed haughtily into the room, Louis Stuart-Gordon advanced from the side of the door where he had apparently waited their *entrée*, and, bowing, took his place on the other side of Louise, walked by her side down the whole length of the room, saw them seated, and then with a second and a deeper bow, he left them. All this passed without a word said on either hand. Mrs. Armstrong had never deigned to acknowledge his presence, even by a look. Louise had been silent because the eyes of the whole company were on them, and, perhaps, because she waited for Louis to address her, or that she feared her mother, or had lost for the time the power of speech—who could tell? Mrs. Armstrong and her daughter had no sooner seated themselves than the effects of the coffee, assisted by the glare of lights, the sound of music, the brilliant company, began to show itself in the appearance of Louise. Between the effects of the rouge, the stimulant, and the scene, her complexion had assumed a beautiful, but always delicate glow; her eye, a strange, clear brilliancy; and her expression and manners, a fascinating gayety, that no one who had not known her before could have supposed unnatural; that no one *who had not witnessed the events of the last hour*, could have supposed feverish—nearly delirious? Her sparkling gayety soon drew around her a circle of young men, who were either not so particular as those upon the piazza, or else having seen her attended by her husband, drew the most favorable inferences. Louise had never been witty before, but now repartee, quick and brilliant as lightning, flashed from her glowing lips. She bewitched the circle around her; still, not one among the youth took her out to dance, until, at last, a young gentleman from a distant county, looking at her from across the room, seeing her surrounded, and believing her to be some celebrated belle—as, unmarried, she *would* have been—and wishing a presentation to her, went up to one of the managers and requested an introduction. The manager immediately took him up, and begged leave "to present Captain Fairfax, of Jefferson county, to Mrs. Stuart-Gordon."

"Oh! a youthful widow," thought the Captain, and, making a graceful bow, he begged the honor of Mrs. Stuart-Gordon's hand in the set that was forming. At a sign from her mother, Louise arose, gave him her hand, and was led to the head of a quadrille.

"My daughter is in high beauty—in fine spirits—greatly admired—she will dance. We will see whether those Island people shall please themselves with the idea that her heart is breaking," exclaimed the lady, in a low voice, as she gazed in triumph upon Louise upon the arm of Captain Fairfax—Captain Fairfax being *the* lion of the evening! Soon her triumph was turned to humiliation. Captain Fairfax had led his beautiful partner off to the head of the set, admiring her with enthusiasm, wondering what the young gentlemen could have been thinking of, not to have secured the honor *he* was now enjoying, and heartily congratulating himself upon his singular good fortune. He perceived that all eyes were turned upon himself and partner, he heard all lips whisper about them, and he flushed with gratified vanity, for he verily thought it was in admiration of his partner and envy of himself. It was not until one or two ladies had retired from the set, that was not yet completely formed, that he began to perceive that the unusual buzz was one of surprise and disapprobation. Now the light broke on him, and he understood that he had committed himself in some ridiculous way. The perspiration started from his brow. There are some vain men who would rather commit a crime than a *faux pas*. He was one of them.

Wiping his brow, he turned to his partner and said—

"The room is very close—crowded—Mrs. Stuart-Gordon, had we not better sit down?"

Louise raised her eyes steadily to his face, and said, with a strange smile, "Oh, sir! I am a *very small* woman—consume but little air—fill but little space; is it not strange, then, that as soon as I appear, the atmosphere should grow so close—the set be found so crowded?"

Captain Fairfax only replied by a grave bow, as he led her back to her seat. The artificial gayety of Louise was over for that evening. Defeated, mortified, and enraged, Mrs. Armstrong soon arose to retire from the saloon. Again Louis Stuart-Gordon suddenly appeared, and walking by the side of Louise, attended them from the room, waited for them at the foot of the stairs, and when they came down, cloaked and bonneted, still walking by the side of Louise, he attended them to the carriage. Mrs. Armstrong drew herself up haughtily on one side. Louis handed his wife in, saying, as he pressed her hand—

"Do not appear in public again, Louise," and retired.

"Oh! I will not, I will not!" replied Louise, sinking, sobbing, in one corner of the carriage.

Mrs. Armstrong could have strangled him on the spot. Repelling his proffer of assistance with a haughty gesture, she stepped proudly into her carriage, which was immediately driven off. The darkness of the winter's night, the darkness of the carriage, prevented Mrs. Armstrong from seeing the face of Louise. She heard her stifled and convulsive sobbing, but, feeling disinclined to converse, she was silent during the whole drive. Arrived at Mont Crystal, they alighted. She drew the arm of Louise through her own, and led her up into their sleeping apartment. It was now between three and four o'clock in the morning. The room was well warmed and lighted, and every way comfortably prepared for their reception. Mrs. Armstrong threw herself into an easy-chair by the fire, and called Kate to assist her in undressing. Without removing any of her clothes, Louise paced in a nervous and excited manner up and down the floor.

"Come to the fire and warm yourself, my daughter," said the lady.

"No, no; I am not cold."

"*Undress and retire to rest, then, my dear.*"

"I cannot—I cannot! I cannot rest anywhere."

Mrs. Armstrong now turned around in her chair, and noticed the frightful pallor of her daughter's countenance as she walked wildly up and down the floor, wringing her hands.

"Louise, sit down and compose yourself—I insist upon it."

Still Louise, with pallid brow and bloodshot eyes, paced distractedly up and down the floor.

"Kate, leave me! I can undress myself. Go and prepare your young lady for bed."

Kate left her mistress, and went to Louise. She turned away from her, wildly exclaiming—

"No, no!—no, no! I cannot! I will neither sleep nor eat, until I have rejoined Louis."

"What does she say?" exclaimed Mrs. Armstrong, risiug to her feet, and gazing in astonishment upon the strangely excited girl. "What does she say?"

"I say, mother!" exclaimed the half-delirious girl, walking rapidly up to the lady, and standing before her with her thin hands writhing together, and her haggard eyes strained half out of her head—"I say, mother, that this separation is cruel, monstrous, insupportable! It is killing *me*—*that* is of no consequence; but it is killing Louis too—that noble Louis, whose only weakness is to love a weak and worthless fool like I am! I say, mother, that Louis is so noble—so generous—so magnanimous! I say, I love and admire him more and more every day I live! I say, I do not believe *one*—no, not *one* of the base calumnies that you have heard of him—and from my heart, I beg his pardon for a moment's doubt of his immaculate honor! I say, mother, that no one can look upon his face, hear his voice, and doubt his probity; and I say, mother, that I must, *must* rejoin Louis, if indeed he will forgive and receive me again. *Must!* mother, do you hear. Oh, I have treated him shamefully, and he has behaved like an angel to me. Yes, you may curse me, mother, as you have often threatened. You may kill me; but I will not eat, drink, or sleep, until I have sought the feet of Louis, and obtained his forgiveness!"

"Oh, she is crazy, frantic," exclaimed the lady, taking the hands of Louise, and forcing her into a chair. Unhook her dress, Kate, and then go and get me some opium. She is nervous, hysterical, delirious."

And so she was. Mrs. Armstrong heard all her raving without alarm, confident in her own confirmed power over her daughter, and knowing full well that when all this nervous excitement was over, she would relapse into a state of more complete feebleness than before. And she judged rightly. Louise fell asleep under the influence of the opiate, and slept till a late hour the next day; then she awoke, feeble in body and mind, depressed in spirits. Taking advantage of this mental and physical exhaustion, Mrs. Armstrong sat down by the bedside of Louise, and gravely charged her with discreditable levity at the ball—with gross irreverence to herself, and violent and unlady-like conduct in presence of the servants—repeating all the most objectionable things that poor Louise, in her nervous delirium, had said and done.

Louise listened without attempting to defend herself, and after talking with her for an hour, Mrs. Armstrong left her with her ideas of right and wrong again all confused—her confidence in herself destroyed, and her will and fate altogether in her mother's power.

CHAPTER III.

MARGARET.

'Tis dawn—within a curtain'd room,
Fill'd to faintness with perfume,
A lady lies at point of doom.

'Tis morn—a child hath seen the light;
But for the lady, fair and bright,
She sorrows in a rayless night.

Anonymous.

Several months passed away, and winter gave place to spring. Again the scenery in the neighborhood of Mont Crystal bloomed out in the perfect glory of beauty. Again The Isle of Rays seemed a terrestrial paradise. But still Louise faded in the light of Mont Crystal—still Louis withered in the sunshine of The Isle of Rays. Will it be credited that these two young people, fondly attached to each other, placing implicit faith in each other, united by the holiest tie, as they had been, were still kept separated by the implacable will of one determined woman? The neighborhood had exhausted conjecture as to the cause of the separation. Some said that Mrs. Armstrong was incensed at the marriage of the General; some said that a prior attachment had been discovered to have existed between Louis and Susan *Somerville*; some thought it was from a dissatisfaction about the settlement of the property. As usual, there were a few grains of truth mixed up with much falsehood. At last, however, the facts of the case crept out, and it was generally known that this state of affairs existed by the simple will of the mother-in-law; and then the whole party on both sides was condemned by public sentiment; for although the weight of public censure fell heaviest upon Mrs. Armstrong and her daughter, yet the family at The Isle of Rays did not escape the charge of weakness. I have often heard the conduct of Louise and Louis both arraigned and judged with great severity, and as I think with gross injustice. The full force of public reprobation fell most heavily of all upon Louise. In this she was cruelly wronged. No one considered her extreme youth, her natural weakness of will and gentleness of temper, and the almost omnipotent sway of her mother over her—nor her peculiar education, taught, as she had been, filial obedience as a religion, ready as she was to sacrifice to that filial sentiment her heart's most natural instincts and warmest affections—nor her physical delicacy of organization, through which she would have perished in any violent conflict. No one considered these things but Louis Stuart-Gordon, who for her peace denied himself the society of his wife, refrained from opposing the influence of Mrs. Armstrong, or importuning Louise—thus exposing himself to the animadversions of a neighborhood incapable of understanding his motives of action. I have heard Louis called *weak, timid.* Nothing could be more stupid or unjust than this opinion. Of a high-toned sense of honor, of fine susceptibilities, of warm temperament, Louis Stuart-Gordon yet suffered this long estrangement from a young and lovely wife, to whom he was fondly attached, and braved the scorn of society, rather than give her pain by a conflict with her unscrupulous mother. Louis was *brave to defy and strong to endure* suffering in his own person and reputation. Louis was *not* weak or timid, except in giving pain or causing misery to *others.* No! I have always wished to vindicate the motives of Louis, whose lovely character approached the angelic.

Four months had passed away since the ball of the Prince's School. Every letter written from the Isle of Rays to Mont Crystal had been cast into the fire without being read. As has been said, Louis had at last ceased to importune them with letters. Many times indeed poor Louise had rebelled, as on the evening of the ball; but it was always under nervous excitement, which, subsiding, left her weaker and more enslaved than before. They were mere spasms of courage and resolution, ending in apathy—abortive struggles of her feeble will, always to be repented of and atoned for as sin.

It was early in April that Louise, then little over seventeen years old, became the mother of a little girl—a fine, hearty child, of firm muscle, brilliant eyes, and strong lungs—who persisted in living, despite all Mrs. Armstrong's diabolical machinations to the contrary. Let us be exactly just. Under existing circumstances, the expected maternity of her daughter had been a source of great grief and mortification to Mrs. Armstrong—so much so that the fact had keen kept a profound secret in the neighborhood, up to the very day that the babe was born. Nevertheless, *now*, that the infant was laid living on her lap, she no longer wished to smother it. By a law of nature, acting unexpectedly upon a heart like hers, she felt the appeal of this helpless and beautiful being, (young babies are *all* beautiful, male opinion to the contrary notwithstanding,) and Mrs. Armstrong was surprised to find in her own heart a possibility of loving this child. This sentiment, however, instead of softening her heart towards its father, only gave additional force to her jealousy of Louis, as she wondered whether he might not wish to deprive her of the care of the babe. The reader has already seen that the maternal instincts were strong as they were selfish in Mrs. Armstrong.

"A boon, mamma, a boon!" cried Louise, a few moments after the birth of her child, still pale and palpitating with her recent agony; "a boon, a boon!"

"Well, well, my daughter, what is it?" inquired the lady, disturbed with the fear that Louise was about to make some request of which Louis Stuart-Gordon might be the object.

"*This*, mamma; that I may name this little girl myself."

"Certainly, Louise; certainly, my daughter; that is the one thing with which I will not interfere—a mother's control over her own child," said the astute woman, adding mentally, "she cannot name her Louis, or Henry Cartwright; she will not call her Britannia, and any other name is indifferent to me. Yes, Louise," she repeated aloud, "that is the one thing in which I will not seek to control you—your disposal of your own child."

"She is all mine, then, mother, all *mine*" said Louise, with brightening eyes.

"As much as you are mine, Louise; remember that. The tie between a mother and child is a chain to which all other ties are shreds of cobweb. Ah, you must know it now, Louise."

"I do think so, indeed, mother; and yet—"

"There, you have talked enough, Louise; not another word—not *one*, my daughter! you must sleep now." And nipping the threatened controversy in the bud, Mrs. Armstrong drew the embroidered curtains, and retired from the bedside.

For the next three days, carriages were coming and going to and from Mont Crystal. Although the county people severely censured the conduct of the mother and daughter, and although they had entered into a sort of tacit conspiracy to mortify them at the ball, yet few of the county ladies could resist the attraction of the new-born baby, the heiress of two such vast estates as Mont Crystal and The Isle of Rays, or the temptation of calling upon the childlike mother. Her marriage had been such a splendid triumph as to dazzle the county—her separation so sudden and unaccountable as to shock and stun the neighborhood. Now a babe was unexpectedly born. The doctor had spread the news. Doctors are great gossips; that is one of their methods of curing, especially hypochondriacs. Now a babe was born! Who would have thought it?—she was so young—it was kept so close. In fine, the county ladies wished to see how Louise looked, and how Mrs. Armstrong deported herself under all these circumstances; and so for three or four days carriages stood before the gates of Mont Crystal. Like all secluded people, they wanted a spectacle—a scene; but in this they were disappointed. "Not at home," "Particularly engaged," were the words with which the majority of the visitors were received. A few privileged individuals were admitted to the drawing-room, and received by Mrs. Armstrong. But even with these she maintained a cold and reserved manner; and, in reply to their inquiries concerning Louise, they were told that Mrs. Stuart-Gordon was still too weak to receive visitors in her apartment.

Some certainly sympathized with the youthful mother, and called to see her from a better motive than mere curiosity. Their reception, however, was no more favorable than that of less deserving neighbors.

It was about a week from the day of her *accouchement* that Louise was sitting, propped up with pillows, in a delicate lace cap and a rose-colored wrapper, near one of the front windows of her chamber. It was the same large, airy front chamber called the summer room, and was furnished with the same white draperies. The window near which Louise sat was closed, and the muslin curtains were drawn; and near the easy chair of Louise stood the crib of her baby, all draped with white. The young mother's attention was divided between the crib and a little spy-glass she held in her hand, and with which, after drawing aside the curtains from the window, she would contemplate The Isle of Rays. It was while she was thus occupied that the door was opened, and "Miss Somerville" was announced. Susan was clothed in deep black, and very pale and thin, yet wearing her habitual expression of profound serenity. She entered and advanced quietly, and taking both the hands of Louise, kissed her with affection. Louise received Susan with a sorrowful tenderness, as she remembered her former injustice. Without speaking, only returning her caress, she made room for Susan in the large easy-chair, big enough for both. Miss Somerville took the seat, and again threw her arms around Louise, and kissed her affectionately. Then she inquired—

"Where is your mother, Louise?"

"Closeted with her overseer."

"How long shall she remain there, Louise?"

"For two or three hours yet; they are arranging about the crops. But, dear Susan, you have not been to Mont Crystal before since my return. Why was that, Susan?"

"My love, I might return the charge and the question. You have not been at The Crags."

"Ah, Susan, I am not my own mistress. Besides, I have been *so* unhappy, dear Susan!"

"I know it, my poor girl—I know it; and I should have come to you, but that I have been very ill, and my illness left me very feeble; and I have no horse now, Louise, and the ten miles between The Crags and Mont Crystal is too long a walk for me. This is the first time I have attempted it."

"Susan! you do not say that you have walked all this distance to see me?"

"Yes, my love,"

"And you, too, have had troubles, severe sorrows, that you do not speak of, dear and generous Susan—strong and courageous Susan?"

As in tacit contradiction of her thoughts, Susan turned a shade paler, and trembled slightly.

"And Anna is dead, Susan?"

Susan bowed her head in reply.

"And poor old George and Harriet, Susan—how do they bear her death?"

"Better than they bore her life, or rather the uncertainty of her future—"

"Are they cheerful, then?"

"At last—yes, an old couple like them, married in early youth, living nearly half a century together, become all in all to each other—but, Louise, you are weeping! Do not weep, Louise," said Susan, pressing her arms around her and kissing her.

"No matter! Do not mind my tears. There! they are gone. Tell me about Zoe. *She* was somehow mixed up in all that dreadful business?"

"It was all a mistake, or rather a conspiracy. Zoe is not a mulatto, never *was* a slave. Brighty knows that; so does Gertrude and Brutus; and they all visit her and receive her freely now."

"Then why do they not prove it—why do they not establish it—why do they not punish those who have belied and persecuted her?"

"Alas, you do not know what you say, child! She has been under the strongest circumstantial evidence adjudged to be a slave, and has been sold, bought, and enfranchised, as such. We know better from conviction, but we have no means on earth of proving it."

"And Brutus, then, cannot marry her?"

"Certainly not, my love, until her true position is understood; but Louise, let me say *this* to you—let me force it earnestly upon you—treat Zoe with all the affection that is in your heart for her—she has a claim upon *you* and upon *me*. And, Louise, my love, another favor—keep what I have said about Zoe to your own bosom."

"I have no secrets from mother," replied Louise.

Miss Somerville looked troubled for an instant, and then her countenance cleared off as she said to herself—"It is well I told her no more."

"Who is *Zoe*, then, Susan?"

"My dear Louise, I have told you enough to enlist your respect for Zoe. I dare tell you no more."

"You will at least inform me how our dear old teacher is. The dreadful shock drove him mad for a while, but his madness subsided into a happy dotage."

"The schoolmaster is dead."

"Dead! dead! He, too! Alas! every one can die but me! The maiden and the old man! Every one but me! Why cannot I die?" exclaimed Louise, as her pallid features contracted violently, and relaxed as she burst into tears.

This was one of the spasmodic fits of grief to which she had been subject of late.

Susan Somerville had started, looked at her in surprise; then, rising, she took the sleeping babe from the crib, and laid it on her lap. The child awakened, opened its eyes, and looked up. In a moment, the quick emotions of her childish mother changed. Wiping her eyes, she looked down at the babe with a new realization of possession and consolation. She looked in silence a long time, seeming quite lost in the contemplation of her treasure, while Susan stood bending over them and half embracing her. At last, taking the hand of Susan Somerville, without lifting her eyes from the babe, she asked—

"What do you think of my baby, Susan?"

"She is a fine, strong, hearty child."

"But whom does she resemble?"

"Not you, Louise, and not Louis. The form of her head, neck, and jaws, express the sign of great strength and determination. She will resemble General Stuart-Gordon and Mrs. Armstrong," replied Susan, looking with great interest on the babe. "What are you going to call her?"

"Margaret, after the idolized mother of Louis. Susan, tell Louis when you see him that there is another Margaret Stuart-Gordon. Susan, do you often see Louis?"

"Yes, very often. He spends nearly every evening with me at The Crags."

"With *you*, Susan?" exclaimed the young wife, while a slight spasm of distress agitated her violet-pale face.

"Yes, with me," replied Susan, calmly. "You know I always was his friend. I am so still. He needs me in his sorrow, and I will not fail him!"

Louise pressed her hand, and said—"But people are so censorious, dear Susan; and under all the circumstances—"

"The world will make no mistakes about *me*," answered Susan, with a gentle dignity.

Louise raised her eyes to that pale but angelic countenance, and acquiesced from her profoundest soul.

"Since you have named Louis, will you permit me to ask you some questions about him?"

"Yes, yes; oh, yes! Heaven bless you for coming, since you may be said to come from Louis. Go on."

"Have you ever received any letters from Louis since your residence here?"

"Not one."

"Yet he wrote to you many, many times, until he abandoned it in despair of getting an answer. Have you never written to him?"

"Oh, yes; many, many letters."

"Yet he never received one! It is plain, Louise, that all your letters have been intercepted."

"Oh! who *could* have been so cruel?"

"It is not for me to say, Louise; it is a dreadful thing. Let Providence reveal it in his own time and method!"

"Oh! Susan, I am so glad you are here to tell me this. God bless you for coming! Come again, Susan! come often! and since you see Louis, tell him, Susan, that I love him still, and always—that I pray for him day and night—that I thank him devoutly for his forbearance towards my mother—that I admire him more than ever—that I would die for him—but that I cannot break my mother's heart, or dare her curse! Tell him I have named my child after his mother. Tell him that I love this child more than life. Yet, assure him, that if he desires it, I will press my last kiss on this infant's lips, and send her to him, if her presence would comfort him. Tell him, for my own part, I feel weak, and altogether unworthy of his thoughts; that I only wish to die, as the only means of extrication from this trouble. To die, that he may be happy. Grief for the dead is less severe than sorrow for the living!"

"Louise! Louise! you *will* perish in this conflict between the prejudices and perversions of your strange education and the natural and good qualities of your heart. Yes, Louise! *that* is an internal conflict worse than the controversy between your mother and your husband's family; and it is a suffering from which even the angelic goodness of your Louis cannot save you. You are not doing well, Louise, and your heart tells you so, for you call yourself 'weak and unworthy.' Resolve—return to Louis. I will bear any message to him. I will bring him here to-morrow—to-night."

"No, no! no, no! not for a thousand worlds," exclaimed the imbecile girl, turning very pale. "Do you know my mother, that you propose that? Oh! the scene would be frightful. I can bear any thing else—but I cannot *dare* a mother's curse."

Louise suddenly started, and suppressed a scream—Mrs. Armstrong stood before them! She had entered unperceived, while they were absorbed in conversation. Susan Somerville arose and courtesied, without offering her hand, or reseating herself. Mrs. Armstrong bowed coldly, and then addressing herself to Louise, asked her how long she had been sitting up?

"Nearly two hours, but I am not tired, mamma;" pleaded the daughter.

"Nevertheless you must lie down!" decided the lady, lifting the baby from her lap, and replacing it in the crib. "Miss Somerville I am sure, will excuse us."

"I am about to take my leave, madam," replied Susan.

"Mother, Susan *walked* here," said Louise.

"Then, Miss Somerville, you must either give us the pleasure of your company all night, or permit me to send you home in the carriage," said Mrs. Armstrong, who, with all her deviltries, was a Virginian lady still; and, as such, a loyal observer of all the laws of hospitality.

Miss Somerville thanked Mrs. Armstrong, but informed her that she was engaged to spend the afternoon and night at the Dovecote with Zoe. Susan then embraced Louise, and took her leave. Mrs. Armstrong had apparently forgotten her intention of putting Louise to bed, for she wheeled an easy-chair close to the crib near her daughter, and sat down, saying—

"I am constrained to declare that Miss Susan Somerville is far too independent for her sex and years. To think of her openly visiting the Dovecote! If she continues to do that, the doors of Mont Crystal shall be closed against her."

"Oh, but mamma," said Louise, "Zoe is not what she has been represented to be. Susan, and the Lions, and even Brighty, have found out something—a conspiracy, they say—but Susan did not tell me what it was—but mother! mother! good heavens, mother! What is the matter?"

Mrs. Armstrong had started from her chair, grown ghastly pale, sunk back again, with her face crimson, and the veins in her forehead and temples full and distended.

"Oh, my Heaven! mother—mother!" exclaimed Louise, starting forward; "Kate—Kate! here—here! help! my mother is dying!" and she ran and pulled the bell violently. Several servants ran in. Mrs. Armstrong was placed upon the bed. The physician was sent for. Ice was placed at her head, and bottles of hot water at her feet. Louise was frightened and helpless as usual.

"Do not be alarmed, madam," said Kate Jumper, who seemed to understand the case—"*this is only a rush of blood* to the head;—*it'll be better soon.*" And, in fact, before the arrival of the physician, Mrs. Armstrong was relieved.

But now came the strange part of it. As soon as her senses had quite returned, she dismissed all her attendants from the room; and, regardless of her own exhaustion, or her daughter's feebleness, she summoned Louise to her bedside, and made her repeat all the conversation of which Zoe had been the subject. Then partially reassured, she dismissed her to bed, and recalled her attendants, by means of the bell whose handle was in her reach.

The next morning, Mrs. Armstrong was up early, and having seen Louise made comfortable at her favorite window, with her babe beside her in the crib, and having given orders that no one should be admitted during her absence, Mrs. Armstrong entered her carriage, and drove out. She was gone all day. She returned haggard and wretched in the evening. The next day she was closeted with a lawyer, a stranger, and her overseer; and at the close of the conference, looked better satisfied. The third day, letters were written, and packets sent off to the post-office. The remainder of the week there was a great bustle all through the house.

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The 1st of May, a neighbor passing by Mont Crystal, found the house shut up. Inquiring of a man who was superintending the working of a contiguous field, he was told that the family had removed quite suddenly—so suddenly, that no one had suspected their intention until they had gone—no one knew whither—not even their relatives at The Isle of Rays. That the house was closed, and the lands leased—and the negroes hired to the lessee; that he himself was the overseer appointed by the planter who had taken the Mont Crystal estate.

CHAPTER IV.

LITTLE BRIGHTY.

An airy, pleasant chamber, with the rose vines
Woven around the casement.
Miss Mitford.

A youthful mother to her infant smiling,
Who with spread arms and dancing feet,
And cooing voice, returns an answer sweet.
Miss Baillie.

I AM about to take you into a pleasant room, and into pleasant company. If there was one room more delightful than all the others at The

Isle of Rays, it was Brighty's summer room. It was on the ground-floor, and opened in front by glass doors upon the piazza, and at the back by similar doors into the garden of roses; in fact, it was the room on the left, corresponding to the pleasant breakfast-room on the right—the garden of roses running the whole length of the back of the house. Brighty had chosen this room for her midsummer boudoir, for the sake of her two passions—the music of birds, and the fragrance of flowers, borne upon the summer breeze into the chamber. These could not be had in an up-stairs room, for Brighty could not delight in the songs of birds imprisoned in cages, or the perfume of flowers dying in vases. To give her pleasure there must be freedom and gladness in the bird, and life and freshness in the breath of the flowers. Brighty said she would always feel a quaver of sadness in the merriest trills of a caged bird, and a scent of faintness in the richest odor of a plucked flower. But perhaps Brighty was fanciful—which, as mistress of The Isle of Rays, and as the darling wife and spoiled child of General Stuart-Gordon, she had a right to be. Well! this summer room, with its vine-shaded piazza in front, and its garden at back, and the cheery trill of birds and the dewy fragrance of flowers wafted through it—this beautiful room! with the carpet on the floor, and the paper on the walls, both of the same pattern, namely, a white ground, with red roses running over it, with its white muslin over pink curtains, with its lounge and chair covers of fine pink and white Marseilles quilt-work—this cheerful room, with its bevy of gay girls gathered around one, leaping, crowing, laughing baby—that is, to wit, upon the fifteenth of July, in the year ——.

As might have been expected, both from her position and her personal accomplishments, Mrs. General Stuart-Gordon became the leader of the *ton* in the county. The Isle of Rays became the seat of elegant hospitality. And never had the black satin vest of the stout General required greater breadth for expansion of the chest, than when seated at the foot of his own table, doing the honors of a dinner-party, at which his young and beautiful wife presided with equal dignity and grace.

And Britannia enjoyed her position immensely, I assure you. Yes, I am afraid above every thing else, until one fine summer's morning, while the sun was shining and the *dew glistening—while* the flowers were *blooming and the birds singing*—little Brighty *arrived, and Britannia* had a revelation of another heaven than that of marble palaces, silver plate, and priceless jewels; and the gates through which that heaven was visible were the azure gauze curtains of a rosewood crib. You know that Britannia, even in her cold, polished girlhood, while eschewing love with youthful scorn, admitted that she did love whom she pitied or protected—judge, therefore, how she loved this bright new claimant for her pity and protection.

"And I am very glad she is a little girl," thought Britannia; "because this dear General has a son already: besides which, he has such a partiality for girls of all ages, from infancy to old maidenhood."

So the General had—especially since his two Brighties—his damask rose and bud—had rejuvenated him. So the General *had*—a grandfatherly fondness for baby girls, a fatherly fondness for young girls, and a brotherly fondness for old girls. Oh! it was no wonder the General required such a very large black satin vest—he had such a large heart under it. And, as for the girls—babies, maidens, and spinsters—*they all* loved the General, as kittens love hearth-warmth, or as flowers love sunshine.

But the fifteenth of July, in the rose-colored, rose-scented summer-room at The Isle of Rays, were assembled Britannia, Susan Somerville, Gertrude, and Zoe. Miss Somerville, at the earnest and repeated solicitation of General and Mrs. Stuart-Gordon, had been persuaded to spend some weeks of the midsummer at The Isle of Rays. Zoe was engaged to assist in making up an infinite number of summer garments there, and Gertrude, being for the time deprived of visiting The Crags or the Dovecote, favored The Isle of Rays with an unusual portion of her time.

And now these three girls were all down on the rose-figured carpet, contending for the favor of—whom? A little, wilful, bright-eyed sprite of fourteen months' old, who *would* go to one, and *wouldn't* go to another, just as its capricious will dictated. Britannia was passing in and out, engaged in some pleasant household duty, assumed more from choice than necessity. The General was walking about the room, riding-whip and hat in hand, now pausing to smile at the group around the babe, now jestingly wishing that he had a magic chair in which to enchant Britannia, so that she should not make him nervous by fidgeting about so; in fine, quite unable to take himself away from the charming room and its lovely inmates.

Presently Britannia entered, preceded by old Seraphina—or Serry, as the girls called her—bearing a basket of plums, peaches, and grapes; and now the General laid down his riding-whip and hat, and drew off his gloves, calling through the vine-shaded window to Apollo, who stood before the door with two horses saddled, one for his master, and one for himself, to put up the horses, for he should not ride to-day, as it was growing late and getting warm. And then the General threw himself upon one of the settees, and Brighty turned sharply round, and, smiling gayly, clasped his rough chin in her hand, by way of a saucy welcome; and Zoe, bouncing up, ran up stairs, and returned with his blue-and-white chintz dressing-gown, and his sheepskin slippers, and then she took his coat and gaiters, and carried them away. Of course, little Zoe got a caress for her pains, and then she sat down and selected the ripest grapes for the baby, which she held upon her lap, while the others ate fruit. Little Zoe had always a need of some one to worship and wait on, and since the death of her adopted father, and the estrangement of Louise, she had attached herself, lichen-like, to Britannia and the General. Zoe sat there with little Brighty, carefully peeling ripe grapes for her, until old Serry had carried away the basket and returned.

Wanting an excuse to remain in the room, old Serry went up to Zoe, and saying, "Gim me de chile, Miss Zoe," took the little one away, and sat down with her near the window.

"Where is Louis?" asked Gertrude, paring her peach, "I never see any thing of him lately."

"I have not seen him since breakfast," replied the General.

"I hab," said Serry, putting in her word with the freedom of an old Virginia domestic, "I hab see. Marse Louis dis mornin'. You see, Miss Drertrude, Marse Louis, he never let me put Miss Louise's rooms to rights—never. Won't let me 'sturb a single thing no more an nothin' at all. Dat room is a scan'lous sight. Dere's Miss Louise's workstan' jes' as she done left it—drawers all out, things all strowed all over de top, and even so much as her needle a sticken' in her sowin', jes' as she got up an' left it de day she went home with her ma. Oh! my blessed Heavenly Marser, don't I pray for dat 'oman's 'version—three times down on my knees every day, reg'lar as the day comes. 'Taint no use dough—*not* a single bit. I goin' *to stop of it; I goin' to stop* a botherin' my Heavenly Marser about her, 'cause you see, Miss Drertrude, and young ladies, it aint no sort o' use. Marser can't do nothing 't all wid her; he done let her alone; he done gib her right up to de debbil."

"But where is Louis, Aunty?" reminded Gertrude.

"Oh, yes—where is Louis?" asked Zoe.

"Well, I gwine tell you. I see Miss Louise's rooms open, an' I thinks now I take dis chance, and go in dere and clean up. Bless you, I aint done gone in dere more an' a year, so I gone in, an', as I tell you, dere work all strow over floor, dere wreaf of roses hung over de glass all done gone, 'cept the stems and de string, an' leaves all dry as powder all strow over de toilet cloff—an' Miss Louise's loose wrapper, all lying over de side ob de bed—and Mr. Louis, he kneelin' down by de side ob de bed, all white, wid his curls tangled, and his face on de wrapper, and his arms stretched up over it. So I jes' looks in, an' I saw dat, an' I jes' pulls de door too softly, an' comes away—I was hurted to the heart—and soon after I sees him get on his horse and ride away. Dere! dere's where he been all day a takin' on in Miss Louise's room. Now he done, lock it up agin, and gone away. Ah, Lord, I like to see the 'oman as would part me from my ole Apple. Dere, dere! dere, dere! its Aunty aint forgot de baby—its Aunty will peel another peach for de baby bunton!" And the old lady gave her attention to her little charge.

"But do you never hear from Louise?" questioned Gertrude of Britannia.

"*Never.* We have discovered that they are living at New Orleans, in great splendor; that they are very much in society, and give large parties—"

"Does Louis never write?"

"*Never.* All his first letters seemed dropped into a bottomless well, for any response they called forth—"

"Nothing will be done with Mrs. Armstrong until *I* take her in hand, and I shall *do* it eventually," said Gertrude, with a determined look. "There is no particular hurry, Louis and Louise are young enough yet—dear me, yes. Louis is but twenty, and Louise but eighteen. Bide a bit, Mrs. Armstrong."

"Ah, Lor'! I wonders, I does, ef she nebber think of her end—when that shet-up-eye come! Don't she memorize dat Louis is got a mother up in Heaven—an angel always a standin' in de presence of the Lord, who can say to him, 'Lord, look down through de slopes of space on earth, and see what is goin' on there; see how a wicked 'oman is a sarvin' out my son, dat I love.' I wonder she don't think ob dat. I wonder she aint afeard to injure a youth as has a mother standin' in de presence ob de Lord, night and day. Goodness! here comes Marse Louis now!" exclaimed the old woman, as horses' feet clambered up to the door; and Louis, throwing himself from the saddle, hurried, pale, and agitated, into the room.

All were struck with surprise and dismay at his extreme perturbation. He sank into a chair, grasping in his hand a paper. Susan Somerville poured out a glass of water, and handed him; he drank it—pressed the kind hand that offered it, as he thanked her with his eyes. Then turning to his father, he said, "I wish to speak with you, sir;" and, rising, he left the room.

General Stuart-Gordon followed.

When they had reached the study, and were both seated—

"There, sir," said Louis, "there are the hopes of a life destroyed."

And he laid the Virginian Republican upon the table between them, pointing out a paragraph. It was under the head of "Proceedings of the Legislature," and was as follows:—

"Hon. J. C. La Compte, from the Committee of the Judiciary, reported a bill for the divorce of Louis Stuart-Gordon from his wife, Louise H. A. Stuart-Gordon, which was read, and laid upon the table."

"There was some foul work here, Louis! Upon what pretence could this have been claimed—upon what trumped-up story—what perjury!"

"Heaven knows, sir. I only see the conduct of—of—*Louise*, in this. I only feel that I have grossly deceived myself in my estimate of that young lady."

"Exactly! Precisely! Compare her with Miss Somerville, Zoe, Gertrude—with my own queenly lady—with any right-minded, right-headed girl or woman—and then judge her."

Louis was very pale and thin, and he seemed drooping with a general lassitude as he leaned back in the high-backed chair, his paleness thrown out into ghastly relief by the black leather of its covering and the black cloth of his dress; and his very voice, when he spoke, seemed faint and broken, from physical debility or mental despair. General Stuart-Gordon looked at him for some moments in silence. *Then he said—*

"You are a Stuart, Louis—a genuine Stuart. It is curious to observe in you the very same traits of character, with the same cast of features, that ruined your ancestors—the same tenderness of heart, the same infirmity of purpose, the same infatuated attachment to the one object of idolatry, whatever that may be. Oh, Louis! be a man—rouse yourself. Zounds, boy! it is a very lackadaisical thing to pine away and die of a broken heart for any woman, even your fugitive wife."

Louis did not reply. There was a weight upon his bosom, a general sinking, that made it difficult to sustain his part of the conversation.

"Listen to me now, Louis. I think I am rather healthier in mind and body than yourself. I will volunteer my counsel; you will accept it or not, as you see fit. First, then, you know, of course, that Louise can never obtain a divorce, however much she may wish it, since nothing can be brought against you—since she herself is the faithless party, while you are guiltless towards her. It is only the blameless and the injured party with whom remains the privilege of divorcing; and certainly in justice it should be so. *Therefore,* no power on earth can free Louise from her matrimonial bondage, but your own. Are you heeding me, Louis?"

"Yes, sir, I listen."

"My advice to you, then, is, to write to Louise."

"Of what avail were that, sir? They take no notice of my letters. I do not know that they even open and read them."

"Ah! you may be very sure that Mrs. Armstrong reads every letter you address to Louise, or to herself, though I presume that Louise never sees them, and that Mrs. Armstrong would certainly not lose the advantage over us of gaining a knowledge of our sentiments and wishes, by reading our letters, while she studiously avoids revealing or committing herself by replying to any one of them. Nevertheless, I am sure she would reply to the letter that I advise you to write. It is this: write to Louise, and ask her if *her* happiness is involved in this matter of freedom from her marriage bonds; tell her that, if so, *you,* in whom, from her faithlessness, rests the only power—that *you* will free her, by an application for a divorce to the Legislature. They will reply to *that* letter!"

"A letter which I shall not write, my father!" answered Louis, rising and walking the floor.

"Why not, Louis?"

"Oh, sir! the whole matter is repugnant, repulsive."

"I know that you are morbidly delicate—fastidious even to a fault; but no odium can attach to your divorce that does not now attach to your separation."

"Sir, it is not altogether that. There are higher, broader, deeper motives of conduct than general odium or approbation, or individual happiness or misery. Marriage is the most sacred tie on earth. The peace of families, the social welfare of the whole community, depend upon its being held so. If Louise and myself have contracted an ill-judged marriage, we must suffer for it, and bear the penalty. Better that individuals should suffer, than that the general tone of moral sentiment should be lowered. Oh! observe, sir! in modern times, in Christian countries, divorces were so rare as to be almost unheard of, until two men in the power of place set a very baleful example, that spread like a slow pestilence over their respective countries. Since the divorce of the Empress Josephine by Napoleon, and that of Queen Caroline by George IV., divorces have become far more common. I trace it to the influence of that high example! My father, we exert in —— county an influence quite as strong, if not as extensive, as that of the illustrious persons I have named, and, believe me, it is dangerous to introduce a respectable precedent for an act of questionable morality in a neighborhood. Still—still—I have not considered this very deeply, the suggestion is new. Perhaps, were the happiness of Louise really involved, I might be induced to set aside all objections not positively founded on pure *right*, were it not for *one* thing—one fetter that binds us together, and must never, never be broken but by death!"

"And that?"

"Is our daughter."

"Louis! nonsense! The little one is in the hands of her mother and grandmother, who it is to be presumed love her fondly. She is sure of the best education that wealth can procure for her, and will be, besides, the heiress of a large fortune. And, Louis, more than all, by the time you are thirty five or six years, when you will be still young, though not youthful, *she*, your daughter, will be grown, and most probably married and settled in life. Mrs. Armstrong is a great hand at early marriages, as you know to your cost—and you at thirty-six will find yourself unsettled as now, Louis. No weakness, *if you have any regard for me. Observe! you married* this child of sixteen, lived with her for five or six months, when she left you. She became a mother, and took away her child to a distant city, and has absented herself for nearly two years, refusing to hold communication with you or your family, even by letter. Pooh! pooh! Your marriage was a farce."

"Not so, sir!" said Louis, with a sort of bitter smile, since we have a daughter who is heiress to two immense estates that comprise more than one-half of —— county, and are valued at nearly two millions!"

"Hum! you might marry again and have a son, a Prince of Wales might disinherit the Princess Royal. Zounds, sir! this girl has abandoned you with the levity of a mistress. Treat the case even so. Divorce her; settle property on her; and forget her—as a paid-off mistress."

The pallid brow of Louis Stuart-Gordon flushed to crimson, as he replied—

"Enough, sir! *I will not.* The honor of my wife and daughter are dearer to me than my own;" and, lifting his hat from the table, he bowed and left the room.

"I wonder if I could not get a writ of lunacy out against that young gentleman!" exclaimed General Stuart-Gordon, testily, as he arose to rejoin the ladies.

A month passed away—a month during which nothing more was heard of the Mont Crystal family. Then General Stuart-Gordon, accompanied by all his family and Miss Somerville, went to spend August and September at the sea-shore. They returned to The Isle of Rays about the middle of October.

Gorgeously beautiful was The Isle of Rays in early autumn. The scarlet foliage of the oak, the golden leaves of the hickory, the rich purple hue of the dogwood-tree, and the bright dark green of the pine and cedar, all growing tall from the Isle, made it resemble from a distance a large and splendid bouquet, set in the clear waters.

The family returned in renewed life to their gorgeous home. Even Louis, by the healthful ministrations of nature, and the soothing companionship of his good angel, Susan, was visibly improved in health and spirits.

It was late in the afternoon of a glorious day, just cool enough to make the prospect of home, a blazing fire, and a warm supper, highly inviting; and twilight was gathering duskily on, giving the neighborhood a sweet, dim, mysterious obscurity; and the wind was rising in the northwest, with that shrill, hollow blast so pleasant to hear in the early winter, when one has a snug fireside, and new warm-hued autumn dresses, waiting to be enjoyed—when the large family carriage stopped before the portico at the Island mansion.

Lights were glowing through the crimson-curtained windows of the drawing-room; and as the carriage approached, a perfect flood of radiance poured from the hall-doors, that were flung wide open by Gertrude Lion, who bounded out to welcome the new-comers, as they descended from the carriage. She caught Britannia in her arms first.

"Oh! Brighty, you are so handsome! your cheek is like a carnation rose! And you, too, Susan, you are blooming like a peach-blossom! And Louis!" roared the Amazon, breaking into a loud laugh, "I vow and declare—how Louis does grow—if he is not almost a man. And you, General," exclaimed she, starting back, and clapping her hands—"you, General! drums and fifes! steeds and spurs! how grand—how sublime—how heavy and pompous you look! Oh! General Stuart-Gordon, shake hands with me, that I may catch some of the glorification, as school-children catch the—"

Here General Stuart-Gordon interrupted her, by starting forward and offering a warm response to this saucy salutation. But the beautiful giantess arrested him by one strong grip of the shoulder, and held him with one hand, while she lifted the other, and raising her snowy finger, shook it admonishingly at him, as she said, with a queer mixture of fun and solemnity—

"*N-n-o—you—don't!* I'm not Zoe, nor Louise. My lips are not as common as a barber's chair! Every body has their pet pride. You are proud of your military fame—of a name that will blaze down the centuries, illuminating the history of our country. Britannia is proud of *herself—Britannia!* Mrs. Armstrong is proud of her *pride.* *I* also am proud."

"It must be of your incredible strength, my audacious beauty!"

"It is *this*—that my lips have never been stained by a falsehood, or touched by a kiss! No, never, even in my loving childhood; and that which made the sorrow of the child, makes the glory of the woman! There; I've made my speech; and now you'll understand, sir, that if in your exceeding great affectionateness, you were to deprive me of that glory—*there*'d be a row!"

And the Amazon relaxed her hold, gathered up her falling torrent of golden hair, and fastening it, stepped back to let them pass to the house. General Stuart-Gordon laughed heartily, as he drew the arm of Britannia through his own, and walked into the house. Louis followed, with Susan on one arm, and leading little Brighty by the other hand. Gertrude shook hands with the coachman, patted the horses' heads—talked to them—a good supper and a good rubbing down—and then sprung with three bounds into the house. The travellers had retired to their rooms, to change their dresses. Zoe, after having welcomed the party, had gone into the wainscoted parlor to await them.

This room was the very perfection of comfort. The dark and polished oak walls, the crimson carpet, curtains, and chair covers, and the blazing hickory fire, all imparted a glowing and genial warmth. The tea-table was set, and the wax candles on the mantelpiece shone down upon the dazzling white damask-cloth and the glittering silver tea-service. Zoe was tripping about, receiving dishes from the waiter as he brought them in, and arranging them on the table. At last, all was ready, and Zoe rung a peal of bells. Soon Britannia and Susan entered, looking charmingly in their first fall dresses—Susan in a dark slate-colored silk, and Britannia in a rich purple satin. They were attended by the General and Louis. Never was a more genial and cheerful company assembled around a social tea-table in a comfortable parlor. Even Louis glanced and smiled and talked—and the ghost of Mrs. Armstrong and her victim child was not suffered to intrude, for that one evening at least.

"Now think of that dear little girl, taking it into her gentle heart to come over here to prepare for us, and welcome us home!" exclaimed the General, looking with affection at Zoe.

"How came you to think of it, darling?" inquired Britannia.

"Why—because it is so dismal, coming home to a cold, dark house, with no one but the servants, though they are warm-hearted poor creatures, to welcome you. Coming home should be a festival; and so I told Gertrude that we would come over here and make some cakes and jellies, and have things bright and nice, and give you a *family*-welcome. Besides, to tell you the truth, I was pining for a little extra housekeeping flourishes. I was dying to make jellies and cakes. Gertrude, though she hates every thing of the kind, indulges me in every thing; so dear Gertrude came over here with me, to keep me in countenance."

The evening passed in gay conversation.

Gertrude and Zoe had a million of questions to ask, and a million of items of neighborhood news to relate. Nevertheless, as the ladies were somewhat fatigued, they retired early. Then General Stuart-Gordon and Louis sent for the mail-bag, which was emptied on the table between them. There were a number of business letters of various dates within the week past, but these were soon thrust aside, when one, directed in the hand of Mrs. Armstrong to Louis Stuart-Gordon, and bearing a black seal, caught their eyes. Louis seized and tore this letter open with a trembling hand. It was from Mrs. Armstrong, and read as follows:—

"RICHMOND, *September* 15, 18—.

"MR. LOUIS STUART-GORDON: It becomes my painful duty to break the long silence maintained heretofore between us, by announcing to you the demise of your infant daughter, Margaret, who died of scarlet fever, after an illness of six days, and upon the 12th instant.

"I presume any offers of condolence on my part would be a work of supererogation. You will not probably be inconsolable for the loss of a child, after whose welfare you have never once inquired—"

"Never once inquired!" interrupted General Stuart-Gordon indignantly. "Why, was ever such a consummate piece of hypocrisy as that? when she knows she has received letters monthly, weekly, sometimes daily, from you. But I see! she is cautious not to commit herself. Go on, Louis." Louis passed his hand once or twice over his brow, and resumed the perusal of the letter.

"The last tie that binds you to my unhappy child is thus cut in twain. You can now have no excuse for retaining a claim upon the hand of one whose peace depends upon your freeing her. You surely cannot value the possession of one whom you have never written to—"

"She actually wishes to make us believe that she has received none of our letters!" again interrupted the General. "Read on, Louis."

Louis finished the letter, the remainder being a consummate piece of eloquence, by which, without descending from her pride, she artfully appealed, now to his disinterested love, now to his chivalric devotion, and all to one end—what she called the emancipation of her heart-broken child.

"Now, then, what do you intend to do, *Louis?*"

"My daughter is gone!" Louis buried his face in his hands for a few moments, and then rising, said—"Yes, I will write to this poor sorrowing young mother! I will write to her, and ascertain if I can by any means promote her happiness"—and, excusing himself, he retired to his own apartment, where he spent the night in writing a long, passionate, and eloquent letter to his wife, expressing his earnest sympathy, his deep affection, his infinite patience, his willingness still to wait, and hope for their future reunion—his resolution to renounce that hope, if her peace of mind demanded the sacrifice. He closed by beseeching her to reflect deliberately, prayerfully, before she decided. This letter was mailed the next morning.

The news of the death of the little girl was announced the next morning after breakfast. It threw a gloom over the heretofore merry family party. Britannia clasped her own child with tremulous affection close to her bosom, as she wept in pity of Louise. Susan Somerville wished to return home, but General Stuart-Gordon would upon no account hear of it. "You must not leave Louis now, my dear young lady. You alone, of all the world, understand and know how to console Louis. He loves you as his twin sister; do not leave him just now," he *said*, "and you shall *never* leave him if I can prevent it," he *resolved*.

Miss Somerville was thus constrained to remain. Zoe also remained to make up the mourning; but Gertrude, who had a mortal repugnance to grave faces and bombazine dresses, fled from a spot where she felt unhappy without being able to alleviate the unhappiness of others.

Louis had scarcely expected an answer to his letter for a week or two. He was surprised to receive a reply by return mail. It was from Mrs. Armstrong, stating that she wrote at the request of her daughter, who was too ill to write herself. The letter assured Mr. Stuart-Gordon that the happiness—nay, the very life of Louise, depended upon her deliverance from her matrimonial ties. A single line at the bottom of the letter was in the hand of Louise, though the letters were nearly illegible, looking as though they were written with a tremulous hand. This was the line:—

"Yes, Louis, my happiness, my repose, depends upon your complying with the request contained in this letter.

"LOUISE STUART-GORDON."

"It is done," exclaimed Louis, growing deadly pale.

The Legislature met in December. Among the first petitions presented was that of Louis Stuart-Gordon. His case was so well known—had excited so much general sympathy, that the divorce that had been indignantly refused to the petition of Louise, was at once granted to the application of Louis. The bill passed without a dissenting voice.

It was Christmas at The Isle of Rays, and all the neighborhood was assembled there to spend the holidays. It was the day after Christmas, at night, that a large party were gathered together in the drawing-room, when Mr. Turner, the solicitor of Louis, was announced. Louis immediately retired with him to the library, where the solicitor laid before him a copy of the act dissolving his marriage. Prepared as he had been for this—the announcement—the printed bill before him—like the sight of the fabled Gorgon, seemed turning him to stone. He gazed, without reading, for the letters swam before him. All had seemed unreal till now. He had seemed to have lived in a dream till now. Now the terrible, the strange reality, that Louise, his beloved wife—Louise, his own from infancy up, still loving, was nothing to him—swam in upon his brain with a force of conviction that again overpowered his delicate organization, and, with a heart-bursting groan, Louis fell forward upon his face. A long and severe spell of illness followed the events of this evening. Miss Somerville remained and nursed him. She alone, of all the family, possessed the power of soothing him. Even in his wildest delirium, his frenzy was best controlled by the gentle voice and soft hand of Susan. He could not bear to miss that gentle sedative tone and touch. He would lie for hours quiet, with the hand of Susan on his brow; but if she left him for an hour, to take needful rest or food, Louis would, with the thoughtlessness or selfishness of illness, grow restive, and fret himself into a fever.

In truth, the gentle and considerate Louis Stuart-Gordon was thoughtlessly cruel but to one being on earth—to the one who loved him most strongly, purely, and disinterestedly, of all the world. How many spoiled children, old and young, resemble Louis in that particular. With every effort Miss Somerville would make to return to The Crags, Louis would suffer a relapse. Poor Susan! She was not his *happiness—only* his comforter; not his health—only his nurse; not his pleasure—only the anodyne of his pain. Yet not now, as formerly, did the life she gave Louis depart from her own soul. Susan was calm, strong, and mistress of herself now. Her love was now so high and pure that she could have resigned him without a pang to any other more beloved woman.

CHAPTER V.

THE TRAVELLERS.

"She shall go east, she shall go west,
To seek for that she shall not find—
A heart at peace with its own thoughts,
A quiet and contented mind."
Landon.

Mrs. Armstrong, from the time of her leaving Mont Crystal, seemed possessed with a perfect *furore* for travelling. She who, until near her fortieth year, had lived entirely in one sumptuous but retired home, now with the strange restlessness of remorse, or fear, or both, wandered from city to city, with a troop of attendants, equal in number to a queen's retinue. Only she avoided the Northern cities, to which she could not carry her slaves. Mrs. Armstrong abhorred the attendance of any one over whom she did not possess absolute control. Her winters were passed at New Orleans, Charleston, (South Carolina,) Washington City, or Richmond, and her summers at the Capes, the various Sulphur Springs of Virginia, or at other fashionable Southern watering-places. And everywhere, the majestic grace of the mother, and the fragile beauty of the daughter, attracted great attention. It was in February of the first winter of their wanderings, that they found themselves in a suite of apartments in the most fashionable hotel in Washington. It was the long session of Congress, and the city was very full of strangers. Mrs. Armstrong had her rooms fitted up with ostentatious magnificence, and soon found herself and her daughter "the cynosure of neighboring eyes." Mrs. Stuart-Gordon was supposed to be a wealthy young widow. Louise excited a very general interest; her extreme youth, her fragile beauty, her deep melancholy and habitual absence of mind, were an inexhaustible subject of surprise and commiseration. In the deep blue eyes of Louise brooded an eternal sorrow; the lids seemed heavy with suspended tears that yet never fell. This was of course supposed to be the grief of a youthful widow, mourning for the premature loss of her husband. And without committing herself by saying it directly, Mrs. Armstrong favored the opinion by implication. Among the many who from various motives paid great attention to the mother and daughter, was Mrs. M——, the lady of the President. Mrs. M—— was perhaps the most dignified and gracious of all the ladies that ever presided at the White House. Certainly her general affability made her the most popular. It was at a public reception that she first saw the pale young beauty who, to her eyes, seemed a sorrow-stricken orphan child, scarcely old enough to be presented; but when she *was* presented as Mrs. Stuart-Gordon, and when she understood that the broken-spirited girl was a widow, all the sympathies of her benevolent heart went out to her. Louise, also, by a corresponding instinct, was attracted to this lady, forcibly. Mrs. M—— occasionally went to the parties given by the ladies of the members of the Cabinet, and here she sometimes met Louise; and even in the thickest crowd, Louise would find herself, she scarcely knew how, in the immediate circle of the President's lady. Mrs. M——, quick to discern and prompt to distinguish excellence of character, had another *protégé.* This was young Frobisher, the secretary of legation, whose high intelligence, and, more than that, whose deep sensibilities, attached her to him with an almost maternal tenderness. Louise was frequently admitted to the domestic privacy of Mrs. M——'s apartments. Here she often met young Frobisher, who more than any other person, deeply sympathized with her sorrows. Louise was reserved, and Frobisher was almost distant, in his veneration for that reserve. And when he had occasion to address her, there was a deep-toned tenderness and respect in his voice, that spoke to the heart of the sorrowing one, and the glance and voice of Louise revealed the gratitude that her voice failed to express. I am afraid that all married ladies are, more or less, match-makers. After having finished up their own marriage, they set about, from various motives of benevolence, interest, or the want of amusement or occupation, to make up the matches of friends and acquaintances. Certainly, it was from motives of benevolence that Mrs. M—— wished and hoped that the deep sympathy of young Frobisher might ripen into a warmer sentiment, and that the supposed young widow might be able to find consolation in the affection of so amiable a youth. And there was the attraction of sympathy *on the one side,* and the need of it on the other, that drew this young man and woman forcibly together. It was not love, but one of those illusive counterfeits of love, that often deceive both subject and object. It was near the close of the session of Congress, that is to say, upon the first of June, that young Frobisher presented himself at the lodgings of Mrs. Armstrong, and requested a private audience. Here he made a formal announcement of his regard for Mrs. Stuart-Gordon, and requested permission to pay his addresses to her.

Mrs. Armstrong bowed haughtily in acknowledgment of this honor, and coldly requested information as to his fortune and prospects, stating that she had heard a rumor of his recall by the British Government. Mr. Frobisher informed her that he was recalled, at his own request—preferred for the following reasons, namely: that he had recently purchased the estates of Clonmachnois, and that he wished to return to Ireland for the purpose of improving the lands and the condition of his tenantry; and also to apply for the reversion of the title of Earl of Clonmachnois, the title of Countess having been voluntarily renounced by Mrs. Stuart-Gordon, by the sale of her patrimony and by her self-expatriation from her fatherland. The heart of the haughty woman bounded at this announcement. Something of this Irish earldom she had heard before, but nothing with certainty, so that she had been altogether incredulous. Now, however, there was no doubting the fact; and a flush of malign triumph crimsoned her cheek, as she thought that, notwithstanding all their humiliations, Louise would at last wear the title and the coronet that might have graced Britannia's brow. Concealing her joy, however, she spoke of her daughter's deep sorrow, that was only now beginning to yield to time, and to the sympathy of friends. She knew, she said, of her daughter's high esteem of Mr. Frobisher—nay, more, of her affection, yet unacknowledged to her own heart, jealous of its fidelity, and superstitious in its devotion to a first love, yet plainly visible to the solicitous love of her mother. Yet she feared that Louise, in her religious attachment to a mere memory, might renounce the happiness within her reach. In fine, she requested time to ascertain her daughter's sentiments upon this projected marriage, before presenting Mr. Frobisher to her as a suitor. Forced to accept this for a present answer, Mr. Frobisher bowed and took his leave, his rather moderate inclination for "the pale young widow" somewhat increased by the prospect of a little opposition.

The reader knows, as well as I do, that she only wished an opportunity of laying her despotic commands upon Louise. The reader knows, as well, how this interview was likely to terminate. Worn out by a long, long sorrow, now quite incapable of opposing any one, much less her imperious mother, and quite in despair, Louise yielded, though her whole nature revolted at the projected marriage. It was some relief to her to know that Frobisher was going to England, to remain for at least twelve months, before he returned to claim her hand. "Who knows?" she said to herself; perhaps I may die before he comes back, or he may be shipwrecked?" for she almost loathed the youth whom, previous to this engagement, she had loved with a sisterly affection.

As for Frobisher, he went away completely deceived—entirely believing his betrothed to be a widow. Once, indeed, he had casually inquired if the late Mr. Stuart-Gordon was not a connection of the Stuart-Gordons of The Isle of Rays. Mrs. Armstrong replied, quietly, that her late son-in-law *was* a connection of that family. And the subject was dropped.

Perhaps nothing on earth but the prospect of a title and coronet would have induced Mrs. Armstrong to compel her daughter to renounce, by a divorce, her claim upon the immense Island estate. Nothing but two such powerful passions as ambition and hatred, coupled with a desire for revenge, and acting upon the mind of a supremely haughty and unscrupulous woman, could have impelled her to the daring career of crime into which she at once entered. To have her daughter once legally divorced, and legally and magnificently remarried—to have that *once* accomplished, she was audacious enough to defy all evil consequences to herself. There is nothing more wonderful in the history of crime, than the fatuity with which a criminal dares almost certain detection and disgrace. It was in this frame of mind that she went to Richmond, Virginia, where the Legislature was still in session, and where she forced Louise to memorialize that body for a divorce.

We have seen how the shallow petition was at once rejected. Mortified and alarmed at this failure, Mrs. Armstrong determined to act upon the other party—to induce Louis Stuart-Gordon, if possible, to petition the Legislature *himself*. *His* petition, she felt sure, would be *received*.

There are few secrets in a family where there are many servants. Mrs. Armstrong had another line of communication with The Isle of Rays besides that of Louis's occasional notes, which she invariably read and put in the fire, without communicating them to Louise. She had left her faithful coadjutor, Kate, in the neighborhood, and it was rather through the gossiping propensities of poor old Serry, than from the treachery of any of the servants, that the conversation of Louis with the General, in which the former expressed his determination of taking no step that should affect the future happiness of his daughter, was reported in triumph to Kate, and conveyed to Mrs. Armstrong at Richmond.

It was then that Mrs. Armstrong put in practice the most daring and adroit deception that ever Satan suggested to self. It was now late in July, and under a pretence of relieving Louise from the care of her child, she sent the former to the sea-shore for change of air, and kept the latter at home. It was while lingering out her weary days at Old Point Comfort that Louise received a letter from her mother, recalling her to the sick-bed of her child, who, she said, was lying dangerously ill of scarlet fever. Louise hurried at once to Richmond, but was told on her arrival that the babe was dead and buried; that the danger of infection had induced the necessity of a speedy interment. Shock after shock had nearly paralyzed the sensibilities of the poor young woman, so that the impression made by this last blow was not so deep as in other circumstances it might have been.

"Oh! I shall soon follow!" was all she said, with a tearless eye, and a wan smile.

She was conveyed to her bed in a state of nervous exhaustion, that prostrated her for many weeks. It was during her illness that Mrs. Armstrong wrote to Louis announcing the death of his daughter, and assuring him that the peace of Louise depended upon her freedom from marriage ties. The reader remembers that the answer of Louis requested to see this wish expressed in the handwriting of Louise herself, before he would consent to act upon it. Mrs. Armstrong smiled grimly to herself, and sitting down, wrote the letter describing the exhausted state of her daughter's health, and reiterating the assurance that not only the peace of mind and health of body, but that the very *life* of her daughter hung upon his answer. This letter she took to the bedside of Louise. Louise was lying with her two emaciated hands upon her pallid brow, shutting out the light from her eyes. Sitting down by her side, she laid her own cold hand over those of her daughter, and said, "How are you now, my love?"

"I don't know, mother," heavily sighed the invalid, without uncovering her eyes.

"Louise, my love, would you like to see Louis?"

The effect of this question upon the poor girl was like that of a galvanic battery on a corpse. She started up with a spasmodic motion, and looked intently into the face of her mother.

"I inquired if you would like to see Louis, my love."

"Like to see Louis! Oh, mother!"

"Well, my child, in consideration of our late and common bereavement, and of your precarious state of health, I have written to Louis to come and visit us."

"Oh, mother, have you? May the Lord of Mercy bless you! bless you! bless you! my own good mother!" cried Louise, throwing herself from the pillow upon her bosom.

"Calm yourself, my child, calm yourself," said the mother, reaching a cordial from a table at hand, and holding it to the lips of her daughter.

Then she laid her back upon the pillow. Her eyes were shining like stars, and there was a bright hectic spot on each cheek, as she smilingly said—"I see how it is, mother; you know that I am dying, and you are willing for me to take leave of Louis before I go. Heaven bless you, mother! Look out the window, mother. It has been cloudy all day long. Look at the west, where the heavy dark-blue clouds lower almost to the verge of the horizon; but not quite, for see, the shining sun illuminates the lower edge of this cloud, and shoots out direct rays of glorious light aslant the earth—and now it has sunk below the horizon. Even so, mother. My life resembles this day—but you are willing to provide for me a ray of sunlight before the night of death falls on me for ever. God bless you, mother!"

Her eyes and cheeks blazed with the fire of fever while she spoke.

"My love, you must not talk so. You are utterly mistaken. You are young and sound, and only suffering from alternate nervous excitement and exhaustion. You will recover your health. But now, Louise, you must attend to this matter in hand. I have written to Louis, requesting him to lose no time in coming to see us. But, after all that has passed, Louis may not be persuaded to come by me. You *must add your request. I know* that you can scarcely hold a pen, my dear, but you can write one line, to endorse what I have written. Just write, 'Louis! my happiness, my repose, depend upon your granting the request contained in this letter.'"

"Give me a pen—quick, mamma."

Mrs. Armstrong placed a portfolio before her, and supported her in her arms, while Louise wrote with trembling hands, at the foot of the letter, the very words of her mother's dictation—

"Louis! my happiness, my repose, depend upon your granting the request contained in this letter. LOUISE STUART-GORDON,"—

and exhausted by the effort, fainted and fell back.

It was thus that Louis and Louise were mutually deceived.

It is wonderful how much sorrow, suspense, and anxiety, the most fragile human being can bear, before the frame gives way. Breaking a heart is the slowest of all methods of torturing a soul to death. No language, I am sure, can describe the sufferings of Louise for the next fortnight. We have seen the apathy with which she bore the news of the death of her child. It was the insensibility of the victim exhausted by previous torture. But now a cordial had been given her in the hope of a new happiness. This had revived her sensibilities, her power of suffering, to a morbid excess. She could not sleep at night, nor rest during the day without an opiate, as days and weeks passed without her hearing from or seeing Louis.

"He will not lose time in writing—he will come at once, mother! he is *so* forgiving—so magnanimous!" had been her first hopeful and enthusiastic assertion. "What *can* be the reason he does not write, at least, if any thing prevents him from coming, mother?" was her despairing inquiry a week later.

"Mother, write again! *do* write! Tell him that I am dying—that I shall never see Heaven if I pass hence without his forgiveness and blessing!"

And Mrs. Armstrong, to humor her, pretended to write.

Another weary week of mental torture passed, and then Louise pleaded—

"Write once more, mother! once more! Plead with him! it is not for *us* to be proud, if he is justly obdurate! Tell him that I am fastened here to a bed of illness—that I cannot put my foot to the ground—that I cannot raise my hand to my head—that, for weakness

I can scarcely make my words audible even to your listening ear! Tell him that I may not live, and cannot die until he blesses me!"

So the heavy weeks passed in torturing suspense, or sorrowful pleadings. So October passed. Louise had told the truth. She could not die. A strange vitality of anxiety held her life, as some sharp pains sometimes keep their victim from fainting. Nay, more; with good medical attendance, with the bracing air of the fall, and the gradual subsidence of suspense into certainty, she recovered the tone of her nervous system sufficiently to leave her bed. November passed. December came; and then her mother, after preparing her for it gradually, informed her of the application of Louis for a divorce. Louise received it with resignation.

"It is justice, it is justice," she said. "I had no right to hope for mercy."

Upon the 1st of January, Mrs. Armstrong placed in her hands the copy of the bill of divorce that had been forwarded to her.

"*It is over!*" said Louise, using the very words with which Louis had received his doom; and at the very time that Louis lay at the point of death with an inflammation of the brain at The Isle of Rays, Louise was again prostrated by a low nervous fever at Richmond.

"Well!" exclaimed Mrs. Armstrong, with a sort of diabolical patience; "all this 'weeping, and wailing and gnashing of teeth' is terribly disagreeable; it is the dust and smoke and smell of brimstone, the blood and groans, remaining after the hard-fought battle upon the field of a victory. Patience! we shall bury our dead, clear our field, and then for the triumph—then for the illumination! In other words, Louise will wear through this misery and illness; and then soon, in another country and under prouder circumstances, our minister shall present a new Peeress at the Court of St. James."

There was little danger that Mr. Frobisher should be prematurely informed of the real state of affairs with his betrothed. Those were not the days of steamships and telegraphs; and little individual villainies perpetrated in Richmond, Virginia, were not then, as now, common themes of gossip in the lobbies of the Houses of Parliament in London. And for the rest, Mrs. Armstrong was willing to dare his after-knowledge of her antecedents, when her *daughter was justly* and legally bound to *Frobisher in marriage.*

Letters from Mr. Frobisher announced his expected return to Washington in February. Thither Mrs. Armstrong, accompanied by Louise, went. They arrived at Brown's Hotel upon the first of February. There they found on the list of new arrivals the name and title of the Right Honorable James Frobisher, Earl of Clonmachnois; and Mrs. Armstrong's heart bounded with pride and joy when she saw it. The young Earl met his betrothed, after an absence of many months, with renewed affection. He passed the evening in her boudoir, and pressed her to name an early day for their marriage. Mrs. Armstrong named *that* day three weeks.

"Mother! Oh, mother! that is the twenty-second of February—the anniversary of my marriage!"

"It is, certainly; but I never thought of it when naming the day! What a singular coincidence!"

CHAPTER VI.

LOUIS AND SUSAN.

Uneasy now becomes perforce
The inevitable intercourse,
Too grateful heretofore;
Each in the other can descry
The tone constrain'd, the alter'd eye,
They know that each to each can seem
No longer as of yore;
Yet each, while thus estranged, I deem
Reveres the other more;
Hers is, perhaps, the saddest heart—
His, the more forced and painful part.
Southey.

At the earnest entreaty of General Stuart-Gordon, Miss Somerville remained at The Isle of Rays until the convalescence of Louis; then she took her departure for her solitary home on The Crags. It was a bright, sharp morning near the last of January that she found herself there. Old George and Harriet welcomed her home, with heartfelt delight. George displayed with glee a bunch of birds that he had brought home for "Miss Susie's" dinner; and exhibited with great pride a vast pile of flag mats, baskets, and children's, men's, and boys' coarse straw hats; all the work of his hands, which he said would bring sixty dollars when he could take them to market. And Harriet displayed some of the whitest spun cotton, which she said would knot beautiful fringes and toilet covers. Both feared, however, that "Miss Susie" would find the house very rough, in comparison with the beautiful Island —

sion. Miss Somerville smiled away their doubts; and, having looked through her house and then laid off her riding-habit, she quietly settled herself with her needle-work by her lonely fireside.

"I am but twenty-one," said Susan to herself, "and yet I begin to feel very much like an old maid."

But she did not *look* so, with her tender peach-blossom cheek, and the silky black curls dropping soft shades upon them.

The day was heavy—it was no use to disguise the fact. Susan found it so; and often rising from her seat, she walked to the windows and looked out from very weariness. And as she remembered the pleasant family circle at The Isle of Rays—the hearty General, the gay Britannia, the sparkling little Brighty, and Louis, her protégé; her patient, suffering, sad, but the more interesting on that account—Susan nearly regretted the morbid self-respect that forbade her to yield to the pressing entreaties of the Stuart-Gordon family, and take up her residence among them.

Night closed around her, and then more than ever she missed the social family circle that nightly gathered around the bright hickory fire in the oak-pannelled parlor at The Isle of Rays. She imagined them as they sat there, after the tea-table was cleared away, the General and Britannia with the chess-board between them. The General, with his deep, hearty laugh, and Britannia with her beaming glance, and half-mocking smile; and Louis? what might Louis be doing now, that she was not there to keep him alive?—reclining back in his crimson velvet chair, watching the game with languid eyes.

A wild blast of wind against the window aroused her from her reverie. She arose and looked out, and found that a snow-storm had suddenly arisen. She resumed her seat; and while the tempest howled around the old house, Susan felt more desolate in her loneliness than ever. George came in with tea and toast, and a lighted candle, upon a waiter. He sat it down on the table by Miss Somerville's side, and then he quietly withdrew.

"The truth is, I have no appetite," thought Susan, as she turned to her solitary meal. "That long sojourn at The Isle of Rays has spoiled me entirely; I can no longer enjoy a meal that is at once very frugal and very lonely."

A second and a wilder blast of the storm startled Susan from her chair, and at the same moment the door was pushed open, and Louis Stuart-Gordon suddenly stepped into the room, stamping the snow from his boots, and throwing off his sleet-covered cloak, and revealing his black suit, slight figure, and pale face.

Miss Somerville paled herself.

"In the name of Heaven, Louis, what tempted you out on such a night as this? you, who are barely convalescent?" exclaimed the young nurse in displeasure, as the imprudent patient dropped exhausted into a chair beside her.

"Do not scold, my loved physician; the storm had not arisen when I set out—it overtook me at the top of The Crags."

"Yet you should not have left the house upon any account—no, not until spring."

"You are mistaken, Susan; I am stronger than you think. I am recovering rapidly. Give me a cup of your nice tea, and it will set me up!"

Miss Somerville went to the other door, called George, and directed him to bring another cup and saucer.

"I missed you—we *all* missed you so much to-day, Susan, but *I* most of all. I seem to be a supernumerary at the Isle, now. In short, Susan, I was terribly bored with my own company, and having a great deal of listless news on hand, I have come to bestow a part of it on you. Have patience with me, Susan."

George now entered with another cup and saucer and more toast, and Susan poured out his tea.

The table was soon after cleared off, and Louis drew his chair in closer to the fire, while the storm raged more fiercely around the house. Miss Somerville quietly pursued her needle-work, but a heavy gloom lowered slowly and darkly upon her spirits. It was a vague sense of error, or wrong, or danger, or dread—or all these together—that oppressed her. She could not avoid sighing frequently and heavily, and glancing nervously at the windows, as she hoped and prayed and watched for the violence of the storm to abate. Louis, for his part, sat there looking the very picture of repose and contentment. He was silent, and sometimes very abstracted, seeming perfectly satisfied to be near Susan, without entering into conversation with her. A wild blast of the hail-storm rattled against the windows. Unable to control her nervousness, Susan arose and put her hand to the latch of the door, intending to look out, but a furious gust of wind blew it violently open—sending a tempest of snow and hail into the room. Susan with all her strength was unable to close the door, and Louis had to get up to help her. Then they resumed their seats, and then, for the first time, Louis noticed her sullenness.

"What is the matter, Susan?" he inquired naïvely.

"Matter? nothing," replied Susan, more disturbed than ever.

"But there *is*, my dear Susan. I have never—no—never seen you so agitated!"

Susan's brow flushed to crimson, and she turned her head aside. Louis took her hand, pressed it, and bending forward, looked searchingly into her eyes.

"Susan, I never had a sister, but you are dear to me as any sister could be—my loved Susan, tell me what disturbs you?"

"I am so sorry that you risked your health by exposing yourself to this storm!" replied Miss Somerville, with a benevolent evasion.

Louis pressed her hand again, and dropped it. The clock struck ten. Louis then arose and resumed his cloak—and took his hat.

Miss Somerville started up. "What! Louis! you do not *think* of venturing out in this horrible tempest!"

"Assuredly, Susan!"

"But you must not, indeed. Pull off your cloak, sit down, remain here. I will have a fire lighted in my grandfather's room for you."

"Do you not understand that I *must* return, Susan."

"No—no! you are mad to think of it. You should not have come at first—but being here, you SHALL NOT depart in the midst of the night and storm."

"But my dearest Susan—"

"But, Louis, it is as much as your life is worth! Sit down—be quiet—don't fidget me —I have had trouble enough on your account already—*so* sit down! I am out of breath."

Instead of sitting down, Louis opened the door, but a violent blast of wind and sleet nearly blew him down, and again it took all his strength to force to the door. He shut it, and throwing off his cloak, sat down. It was literally impossible to reach The Isle of Rays that night.

"Do you know, Susan, that with all your gentleness, you are very audacious in some things?"

"Very, very, courageous in some things, Louis! Yes, I am when I know I am doing *right! Do not* be uneasy, Louis. No one *will misunderstand* or misrepresent *me.*

And so, Miss Somerville tried to think; but as she remembered the censorious propensities of the neighborhood, the sinking of her heart belied her noble words. Nevertheless, Miss Somerville, by turning a guest out in the storm, would not *do* a wrong to escape the imputation of wrong.

"Mr. Louis, I will trouble you for a half hour's conversation with me in my study," said General Stuart-Gordon, rising from the breakfast-table, pushing back his chair, and leading the way thither.

Louis arose and followed.

When they had arrived there, and were seated, the General said—

"You spent last night at The Crags, Louis?"

"Yes, sir. The storm prevented my return."

"The threatened storm should have prevented your going forth, Louis."

Louis bowed, and remained silent.

"You remained all night at The Crags! Well, this caps the climax. If you do not consider the question intrusive, Louis, will you favor me with your reason for going to The Crags?"

"I went thither to see Miss Somerville, sir."

"Hum! you went thither to see Miss Somerville. Louis, do you know that you are seriously compromising that poor girl?"

"SIR!" exclaimed Louis, starting.

"My dear Louis, do you know, or has selfishness blinded you, that you cannot now visit Miss Somerville so frequently, without subjecting her to calumny?"

"Heavens! sir, it cannot be so!"

"*It is so.* Miss Somerville has already been made the subject of invidious remarks."

Louis grew very pale.

"Tell me, sir! by whom—by whom has Susan been slandered? If by any living man, by Heaven, he shall pay dearly for his temerity—if of any living woman, her father, brother, or husband, shall settle the account."

"Pooh! pooh! Louis, I did not say slander —disparaging speculations. Can you call a man out because his wife or daughter 'wonders,' what Susan means, and 'hopes it will all end well.' Pshaw! but, Louis, you are doing Susan a more serious injury than in subjecting her to the gossip of the neighborhood. You are trifling with her affections, Louis."

"No—no, sir! God knows that I am not! Oh, my father, for what do you take me?"

"For a heart-sick, brain-sick, thoughtlessly selfish, and cruel young man."

"In the name of Heaven, what do you mean, sir?"

"That you have won the heart of Susan Somerville—a heart not lightly won or easily lost."

"No, sir! no! It is not so—it cannot be so. Susan, so good, wise, and calm, love a broken reed like me. Come, sir, I am not a coxcomb."

"My dear Louis! it is just such good girls as Susan Somerville that are apt to love such good-for-nothing fellows as you. It is a law of nature. If the good married the good, and the strong the strong, and the evil the evil, and the weak the weak—what a world of beauties and of monsters, of demons and of angels, we should have. I tell you, that this Susan—good, wise, calm, strong, as she is—loves with all her heart and soul this brain-sick, heart-sick, broken-down son of mine."

"Oh, sir, this cannot be so. Heaven forbid that it should be so, indeed. Susan loves me, it is true, but it is as a sister loves a brother, as an angel loves a sufferer!—not else."

"She loves you as a *lover*, Louis!—and you, Louis?"

"And I? I love Susan as a dear sister—I revere her as a guardian spirit—not else."

"Louis, you should marry her."

"Sir."

"You should marry Susan Somerville."

"Good Heaven, sir! impossible! I do not love her in that way."

"And yet you cannot for a single day do without the company of this girl, whom you do not love well enough to marry! Louis, as a man of honor you must do one of two things—marry Susan Somerville, or never see her more! You said that she loved you as a brother, *I* say that she loves you as a lover."

"Are you sure of this, sir?"

"*Sure* of it, Louis."

"Sir, I will take one week to think of it. At the end of this time I will either resign the consolation of Susan's society for ever, or I will offer her my hand!"

"My dear Louis, that is right!"

The week Louis Stuart-Gordon requested was for this purpose: to write once more to Louise—once more, and for the very last time! This letter was an eloquent appeal. He concluded it thus:

"Though an act of the Legislature has divorced my *hand* from yours, no power on earth can divorce my *heart* from yours, best beloved Louise! I am not twenty-two years of age, Louise, yet a few silver hairs are already mingling with the brown on my temples! I have no hope of happiness in the future, except in the feeling that you still *live!* that while there is life there is hope! Write to me once again, Louise, and write to me frankly, for my destiny and that of others, hangs upon your words. Decide my fate for me. There is a lady to whom I am bound by the deepest ties of gratitude. My father wishes me to marry her. I have not yet named the subject to her; for, though her society has been a great solace to me, I regard her only as a sister, and I wished to hear from you again, and for the last time, before taking any step that might raise an insuperable barrier to our future reunion! No other woman has ever approached your throne in my heart, Louise! Write to me frankly. If you will return to me—yea, even if you give me the least faint hope of a vague and distant prospect of a reunion—I will never offer my hand to another woman! If, however, on the other hand, you destroy my slight hopes in that respect, knowing that I shall never be happy in myself, I will offer my days a living sacrifice for the contentment of others. Write to me immediately and frankly, Louise! Remember that the slightest hope of a far-distant future reunion will keep me waiting patiently; for, in spite of all that has come and gone,

"I am still thine own
"LOUIS STUART-GORDON."*

By return mail, Louis received the following reply, written by Mrs. Armstrong:—

"BROWN'S HOTEL, WASHINGTON,
"*Thursday, February* 1, 18—.

"MR. STUART-GORDON:—

"SIR: I am constrained to express my astonishment and indignation at the insolent assumption of your last letter! Nor should I, sir, take the least notice of the insult were it not for the sake of announcing to you the following fact, namely, that my daughter, Mrs. Louise Armstrong, will be married on the 22d of the current month, to the Right Honorable James, fourth Earl of Clonmachnois. Immediately after the ceremony, the newly-married couple will depart for New York, whence they will sail by the first packet to England. I accompany them.

"With *due* respect,
"HORTENSE BLACKISTONE ARMSTRONG."

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* This singular communication and proposal was actually made.

Whenever Louis received a wound, his instincts sent him to Susan Somerville, to have it dressed. So, as soon as he had received this cruel letter, he felt that he needed the gentle girl, whose kind words, and soft tones and glances had such power to soothe his excited mind. He placed the letter in his father's hand, and stood, cap and riding-whip in hand, waiting for him to read it.

"You are going to The Crags, Louis, I suppose," said the old gentleman, taking off his spectacles, and returning the letter.

"I am, sir."

"You remember your promise, Louis—never to return thither, unless it was with the intention of offering your hand to Susan Somerville."

"I remember it, sir, and I go for that purpose."

"It is well!"

"Susan—Susan Somerville—I know that I am utterly unworthy of you! I am a bowed, miserable, and despairing man! You are firm, strong, and calmly happy in your strength. Yet, Susan, *now* I cannot live without you; at least, so it seems to me, and I am about to ask you to undertake the resurrection, the redemption, of just such a lost wretch as I am!"

The face of Susan grew deadly pale, and then flashed back to crimson. She withdrew the hand that he had taken, arose, and walked in an agitated manner to the window. Louis got up and followed her.

"Susan! dear Susan! is it such presumption to hope that I may be able to persuade you to give me your hand in marriage? Why do you not speak to me, Susan?"

"Louis!" she faltered, and her frame trembled from head to foot.

"Well, dearest Susan, but that is no answer!"

"Alas! Louis, do not dream of another marriage—especially with *me*—with me, who had such an affection for—"

"For one to whom I will now allude for the very last time. She is to be married in three weeks, Susan!"

"Gracious Heavens! No!"

"This is so!"

"And you, Louis?"

"Look at me, Susan! I am very calm and quiet! Come, Susan! I have passed two years of widowhood; that is a long time to wear the willow for a faithless woman. She *will marry, she will* go to England; an ocean *will separate us*; we shall never meet again. She is indeed dead to me. Read Mrs. Armstrong's letter!"

"Oh! all this is very horrible!" Susan said, when she had concluded it.

"Now, then, Susan, during all this time that she has deserted me, you have been my good angel; you have kept me from the grave. Say, Susan, will you not bless the life that you have saved? I feel, Susan, as though I could not live without your society. Come, Miss Somerville, make my father, Britannia, and myself, happy!"

"Louis, as far as in me lies, I *will* make you all happy. I will be your friend and sister, as heretofore—and nothing more, Louis."

"Alas! Susan, do you not know that the world does not recognize such a relation between those whom the ties of blood or of marriage do not unite."

Susan leaned her elbow on the window sill, dropped her brow upon her hand, and remained silent.

"Susan, you must either give me your hand, or I must totally resign the comfort of your society. Nay, I have passed my word to my father, to do so."

"Louis! this is strange! this startles me! Louis, leave me."

"Not without my answer, Susan."

"Then take it, Louis. An impulse, strong as life, impels me in one direction—a power inexorable as the grave, holds me back. Between them I am on the rack. Go, Louis! angel—tempter! Go, and let me draw into the quiet."

"Not without my answer, Susan." He took her hand, and pressed it to his lips; he argued, implored, but failed to persuade. After some hours he left, and returned to The Isle of Rays.

Susan dropped, pale and languid, upon the old settee. When Harriet came in to give her a cup of tea, she looked up languidly and said—

"Harriet, you are old and experienced; did you ever know any one who was miserable *all* their lives?"

"No, Miss Susan, I never knew any one, not even the poorest slave, who was miserable from youth to age—except it was from remorse. No, Miss Susan, but I have seen many a cloudy morning clear off beautifully towards mid-day. Is not the sun breaking through the clouds of your life now, Miss Susan?"

General and Mrs. Stuart-Gordon came up to The Crags in the afternoon. Their object was to persuade Susan to accept the hand of Louis.

The truth is, that General Stuart-Gordon was tired of having his family deranged with uncertainty, anxiety, grief, anger, and illness, and all the various passions, emotions, and calamities, that had agitated the Island manor for the last two years. He longed to see Louis comfortably married, and with a young nursery growing up around him. He knew that Louis never could be persuaded to address any young lady, unless it was Susan; he knew, also, that such was the feeling against divorce in the neighborhood, that scarcely any father could be induced to give the hand of his daughter to a divorced man. Miss Somerville had no parents or guardians to interfere, and, besides, she loved Louis. Lastly, she had a great veneration for "those in authority," and for the opinions of her elders in general, and General Stuart-Gordon in particular. She would be likely to yield her prejudices to his persuasions. As for Britannia, she loved sunshine; and Louis, delicate as he was, made a great shadow at The Isle of Rays, especially when Susan was away. And she wanted a female companion; she could not make one of her housekeeper, or her maid. She wanted a lady, an equal. So that I am afraid there was a little alloy of selfishness in the pure gold of benevolence with which the General and Brighty wished to secure the happiness of Louis and Susan.

Miss Somerville did not long hold out against all those influences brought to bear upon her. Not because she was alone and poor, and denied the pleasures of a social family circle, and the comforts of wealth—not because she loved Louis—not for all these strong reasons would Susan Somerville have consented, but because the happiness of Louis and the cheerfulness of his family seemed to depend upon her decision. At last, while Britannia was clasping her hand, and smiling in her eyes, Susan assented. Then Brighty fondly embraced her. The next day, Britannia, attended by Louis and a servant with a led horse, came up to The Crags, to bring Miss Somerville back to The Isle of Rays. Having arrived, Brighty took Susan up stairs. A wide hall divided the second floor, as the first. This hall was lighted by two large bay windows, one at the front, and one at the back. It was also lined with paintings, and furnished with book-cases, rich reading desks, and lounges. On the right side of this hall were the winter rooms of Britannia. Throwing open a door on the left side of the hall, Brighty said, smilingly, "*These are to be your* apartments, Miss Somerville—those on the opposite side being mine. Throwing this fine wide hall between us, we shall not come in contact, or quarrel, you know." Then she conducted Susan in. They were a beautiful suite of rooms, consisting of a boudoir, a dressing-room, and a bed-chamber, running parallel with the hall from front to back, in the order I have narrated them, connected by doors, and each having a door opening upon the hall. The draperies were all light-blue silk, and gave a singularly cheerful aspect to the rooms.

"Now, my rooms, you know," said Britannia, "are in the reverse order of this. My bed-room is in the front, my dressing-room in the middle—oh! that is just where yours is; and my boudoir in the back is turned into a nursery for little Brighty. It was once Louis's dressing-room.

All that week Britannia was occupied in preparing for the wedding.

But now came the trouble and the mystery. From the moment of their engagement—from the moment that the firmness of Susan Somerville had yielded to much solicitation on the part of Louis Stuart-Gordon and his family—from the moment that the factitious interest of the struggle was over, and the object was attained—the spirits of Louis flagged—he sank day by day into a deeper depression. Unlike the lover he had been for a day—unlike even the friend he had been for years—Louis became gloomy, abstracted, and absented himself as much as decency would permit from his betrothed.

And Susan! she watched his increasing despondency with a sad, though quiet surprise—and silently set herself to discover the cause and means of curing his malady.

General Stuart-Gordon observed the ungrateful neglect of Miss Somerville by his son, and became seriously displeased.

Brighty was as much vexed as it was possible for Brighty to be.

The marriage ceremony was to be performed very quietly on the next Sabbath, at church before the morning service.

Saturday came, and the despair of Louis was frightful to look upon. General Stuart-Gordon was indignant, and Britannia herself was struggling against an increasing irritability.

Gertrude Lion and her brother were to be the bridal attendants. They arrived to an early dinner—intending to remain all day and night. The family met at the dinner-table, but the sorrowful abstraction of Louis, much as he struggled to overcome it, damped the spirits of the whole party—even Gertrude's laughter was smothered in something very like a great sigh.

In the afternoon little Zoe arrived.

After an early tea, the household separated—that is to say, Louis went off to his own apartment—Susan disappeared, no one knew where—the General betook himself to his wainscoted parlor to sulk, and Brighty followed him, in an amiable spirit of contradiction, to defeat that profitable object. Brutus Lion stalked off to the stables, and the two girls, Gertrude and her pet, went to their own rooms to have a good confidential girlish talk about matters and things in general, and the approaching marriage in particular. Up to this time, be it remembered that Gertrude had not chanced to know that the aspirant to the hand of Louise Armstrong was her own *ci-devant* admirer, Frobisher. No! *that* Gertrude had now to learn; but we will leave the girls gabbling in their chamber in good time, before the unlucky little tongue of Zoe shall have told the news, or applied the match that shall explode our dear grenade, Gertrude. We will follow Louis, though he is not just now an agreeable object of study.

Louis had left the tea-table, and wandered in an abstraction to his own chamber. It was situated in the front of the house, as I said. It was so early in the evening that the window blinds had not been closed. The windows overlooked the river and the opposite high banks—the highest crowned by Mont Crystal, the old home of Louise. It was very distinct in the evening light.

The sun had already set; but the western sky was gloriously beautiful, with its reflected light. Gorgeous crimson, purple, and golden clouds were piled up like the mountains of ruby, topaz, and amethyst, in the Arabian Nights, and reflected in all their marvellous splendor in the crystal river below. On the eastern side, the moon was just rising, and striking an arrow of diamond light down the stream. Before him was the opposite bluffs crowned by the lofty colonnaded white front of Mont Crystal.

It was a lovely and a soothing scene, yet Louis sickened at it.

He closed the blinds, and sat down in darkness. He sat down in a deep and high-backed chair, and dropping his head upon his open palms, gave himself up to sad thoughts.

An hour passed, and he had not changed his attitude.

Suddenly he felt two light, soft hands descend like a blessing on his head.

He looked up in surprise, and recognized Susan Somerville.

Her hands slipped down over his temples, and then dropped kindly upon his hands, which they took and pressed.

"My dear Susan!" exclaimed Louis, in a tone between surprise and remorse.

She silently pressed his hands, went quietly to the window, opened the blinds, letting in a flood of moonlight, and returning, half leaned over his chair, as she addressed him—

"Louis, you are very wretched—why do you not deal frankly with me?"

"My dear Susan."

"Why do you not honestly tell me the cause of your remorse?"

"Oh, Susan!"

"Why not have said to me, 'Susan, I loved thee as a dear sister, I drew health from thy presence, and cheerfulness from thy talk; but, Susan, I mistook my heart when I thought that I could wed thee.'"

"Susan! Susan!"

"Come, Louis! we have both acted foolishly—we have both been weak and wicked; let us retrace our footsteps while there is yet time."

"What mean you, Susan?"

"Let us break this ill-omened engagement—it *was* wrong; do not let it *become* fatal—come, let us consider it."

"*Never*, Susan! *Never!* Pardon, dear Susan! pardon a few regrets given to the past—they will soon *themselves* be past!—they *are* past. Susan, you merit my entire devotion—you have it."

"Thank you, dearest Louis! but my purpose is fixed. Since you will not agree with me to annul this engagement, I break through it. I came here for that purpose."

"But, Susan, this is hasty—this is rash. You have not considered all the consequences."

"My friend!" said Susan, with a mild solemnity, "I have erred, and suffered somewhat from rashness. I will never be rash again! No, Louis! I have thought of this some weeks, but I resolved to do *nothing* rashly."

"But, Susan—"

"To-night, my mind is made up finally, and," said Miss Somerville, standing up and resting her hand upon the dressing-table—"and Louis! here I take the God and his holy evangelists to witness, that I will never, under any possible circumstances, give you my hand in marriage, or sustain any other relation to you than that of sister and friend."

Louis started to his feet—would have arrested the hand that fell upon the Bible, but it was too late; the oath was recorded.

With a sudden revulsion of feeling—by a strange contradiction, Louis was struck powerless by the sight of the consolation so unexpectedly, so irretrievably snatched from him. At last he faltered out—

"Oh, why! why have you done this? rash and hard-hearted girl."

"To cut this matter short at once and for ever, Louis. And now, dear Louis, we shall be friends again. We have been such strangers since our betrothal, Louis. Now that that is annulled, we shall be friends again. I shall be thy sister and consoler as heretofore. Whenever thou art lonely, or wearied, or troubled, thou shalt come to me—yes, in season and out of season, at all times and at all hours, Louis, and find a sister's affection and a sister's consolation."

"Oh! but, my dear Susan, the world! the world!"

"As I told one gentle one, who is nameless here, the world will make no mistakes about me. Good night, Louis! I go to announce this new phase of affairs to Britannia."

Louis caught her hand, and pressed it fervently to his lips, and then permitted her to leave him.

She went out, with the purpose of descending into the oak parlor to talk with Brighty, when the opposite door of the chamber, jointly occupied by Gertrude and Zoe, was thrown open, and Gertrude Lion, in a state of high excitement, burst out and fled past her down the stairs, and into the oak parlor. Amazed, Susan drew back and returned to her own room.

I'll he hanged, drawn, and quartered, before I stand it! I'll be torn to pieces by wild beasts before I stand it! I'll be blown up from the crater of my own volcano before I stand it!" thundered Gertrude Lion, bounding like a storm into the midst of the room—her tall figure elevated, her fine head thrown back, her yellow hair falling like a cataract, her broad white bosom now red and heaving, her neck, her cheeks, her very brow, flushed to a bright carnation, her transparent nostrils distended, quivering, her light-blue Saxon eyes dilated, blazing.

General Stuart-Gordon and Britannia looked at her in silent astonishment.

"I—I shall break a blood-vessel! I wish I might, it would be a relief. I shall choke to death—I shall burst!" cried the giantess, shaking with her thunder from head to foot.

"Why, what is the matter, Gertrude?" inquired the General.

"HOLD YOUR TONGUE!" shouted the Amazon, strutting up and down the room like a chafed bearess in her cage. "Don't speak to me, I am dangerous; I shall do damage; I shall explode and blow the house up!"

"Can you guess what has angered her, Britannia?"

Brighty shook her head.

"It is insufferably hard, so it is, that out of all the millions on this burdened earth, I only care for one boy, and I am to be swindled out of him!" cried Gertrude, flinging back the torrent of hair, every golden thread of which bristled with agitation. "You all part with your sweethearts and wives with as much indifference as you would resign the partner of a dance. By my own heart's strength, *I* will not. I have felt a long time as though I ought to roll up my cuffs and take that woman in hand! This is a judgment on me for not doing it. I have let her scheme and plot, and marry and unmarry, and torture and break hearts to her own heart's content. Oh, just God! that I have spent so much time in ridding the woods and mountains of wolves and bears, and that I have let this human hyena walk abroad among women, and never resolved to deal with her, until she struck her fangs into my own heart! Selfish that I was! Not for the sake of Susan, of Louise, of Louis, of Zoe, of all the hearts that she has trampled in the dust, did I resolve to punish her! Now she would plant her cloven foot upon my bosom—would marry off *my* boy—my own, *own* boy—the gift of the mountain cataract to *me;* my own beautiful white water-lily, that I found broken and half drowned amid the foam of the torrent and the peaks of the rocks. He took the wrong road then, and was nearly dashed to pieces over the precipice of Mad River Pass, and I saved him. He has taken a wronger road over a madder pass, and is in danger of being thrown over a worse precipice than before, and I'll save him again. That I should let the Armstrong marry him off to a milk-sop like Louise, who is not capable of taking care of him. Set her up with it! What would Louise do with his Irish bog-trotting peasants? *I* would make them work and support themselves. I can't drive slaves somehow. There is a pride in my heart that keeps me from it.

But oh, glory! how I can drive worthless free people! I'd soon have the hillocks levelled, and the bog filled up. But how can Louise help him in his plans of life? Oh, he has been charmed, fooled; he is in a bewilderment. He shall be saved!"

The storm had nearly expended its fury. From tearing and striding—from thundering, blazing, and roaring, Gertrude subsided into sauntering, crying, and exclaiming. The *storm* had subsided, but not the resolution to which it had given birth. General Stuart-Gordon took his paper and walked out of the room. Brighty arose, and, taking the hand of the still somewhat excited girl, led her to a seat by the fire, and placing one hand upon her heaving breast, she inquired, "Now, what is all this about, Gertrude?"

"What is all this about? Why, that I have just heard from Zoe Dove the name of the young man to whom Mrs. Armstrong is going to marry Louise. It is James Frobisher, my own betrothed!"

"My cousin, the Earl of Clonmachnois, whose life you saved! But were you betrothed!"

"Yes—no! That is to say, I do not really know if it was actually so or not. This was the way of it: He passed six weeks with me at The Lair. Just before he went, he asked me to have him—but just to go to a boarding-school for a year, and learn some accomplishments. Well, I told him NO, very decidedly; of course I was not going to have a man for the first asking. I wanted to be courted like other women! I suppose he misunderstood me, or he hadn't time; at any rate, he took my NO, and went off with it! Something in my own bosom assures me that he prefers me to every other woman. Mrs. Armstrong knew it all. She was in the neighborhood all the time while you were away; and in two words, I am going to Washington to forbid the banns."

"You are mad, Gertrude!"

"Then I am the better company for those I go to see!" exclaimed the Amazon, with spirit. "Good night! Late as it is, this night I go to The Lair, and to-morrow, with early dawn, I set out for Washington. Oh, I'll strike her a blow! I'll give her a turn! I'll purposely wait until the last moment—until the bridal circle stand before the parson!—then I'll denounce her villainy! Then I'll insist upon being heard—then and there I will denounce *her!*"

"*You are mad!* Ponder, my dear Gertrude—*bethink you,* we have no proofs!—nay, we are not certain even in our own hearts of her guilt."

"THEN and THERE! in her pride of place, in her hour of triumph, I will denounce her as a traitress—as a murderess! and I will trust to her own conscience, in that moment of surprise and horror, to corroborate my testimony if I am right, or cover me with confusion if I am wrong. Good night, once more! I have no time to lose in vain ceremonies! Make my adieus to the family." And the Amazon bounded from the room.

The next morning, at breakfast, Britannia mentioned the mad freak of the Gerfalcon.

"What! do such a desperate act as that? She will not, with all her madness."

"Rely upon it that Gertrude will do it."

"If she has such a design, she must be prevented from carrying it out. It would kill Louise." And Louis arose from the table and rang the bell.

"Saddle the fleetest horse in the stable!" was the order he gave the servant who appeared.

In fifteen minutes, Louis Stuart-Gordon was galloping rapidly towards The Lair. He arrived in two hours. Gertrude had set out for the metropolis at four o'clock that morning. It was now eleven. She had seven hours in advance of him. Gertrude, with her strong, fleet horse, and her hard riding, would probably reach the city by nightfall. He, were he to set out now, might reach it by ten or eleven o'clock at night. He resolved to attempt it. Writing a hasty line to his family, and sending it by a boy, he set out for Washington.

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CHAPTER VII.

THE SWOOP OF THE GERFALCON.

> An eagle and a serpent wreathed in fight!
>
> *Shelley.*

IN Washington city are several elegant mansions, upon the building, adorning, and furnishing of which the owners have spent fortunes, and from which they derive comfortable revenues, by letting them to foreign ministers, members of the Cabinet, Senators, or other wealthy men, whose temporary sojourn with their families in the Metropolis make such an accommodation desirable. One of these mansions had lately been vacated by the Spanish minister, recalled to Madrid. Mrs. Armstrong established herself in this dwelling for the season of her sojourn in Washington. Here she commenced the splendid preparations for the marriage of her daughter. The first week was spent in ordering an elegant trousseau for the bride, and passed among jewellers, dry-goods merchants, milliners, and mantua-makers; the second week, in superintending the work of the upholsterers; who were engaged in fitting up the rooms in festive style. The third and last week before the marriage was employed in issuing cards of invitation to the wedding. During all these three weeks the gates of Mrs. Armstrong's city residence were besieged with private carriages or hackney-coaches, and the gold basket on her centre-table laden with the cards of distinguished visitors, who had called to pay their respects to the wealthy widow. Mrs. Armstrong had also renewed her acquaintance, and Louise her intimacy, with the amiable and dignified Mrs. M——, the lady of the President.

Louise!—crushed with sorrow, bewildered, lost in the moral maze in which she found herself—Louise faded day by day. She must have taken to her bed, but that her waning strength was sustained by powerful tonics and stimulants—and still her paleness, her emaciation, was attributed to mere physical delicacy.

And young Frobisher!—if there was any thing he admired with enthusiasm, it was fine physical strength and beauty—this had been the strong attraction that had drawn him to Gertrude; if there was any thing he pitied with all his heart, it was physical delicacy. Thus as he had loved Gertrude from admiration, he now loved Louise from pity.

Still it must be confessed that of late the memory of the glorious mountain-girl haunted him like some grand fantastic dream. And he sometimes sent a sigh floating over the hills and forests up into the far mountains of Virginia. I have had little time to analyze the nature of young Frobisher—to show the struggle in his heart between admiration of the beautiful Amazon, and dread of introducing such a savage into the refined circles of English gentility. Young Frobisher lacked combativeness and firmness. With the most elevated aspiration, he wanted decision of character, strength of will, and frequently needed the force of external circumstances, or the influence of another stronger will to impel him in this course or in that. Thus he had acquiesced in Gertrude's negative with very little resistance. Thus he had yielded to the attraction of his sympathies, and the magnetism of the strong and decided wills by which he was surrounded, when he offered his hand to Louise. This subtle influence, this spiritual magnetism, still impelled him in a course which he fancied he was pursuing of his own free will.

Some women want a master, and some men need a mistress. Frobisher was one of the latter.

The day before the wedding came. Louise was very feeble. Frobisher regarded her with visible anxiety. Mrs. Armstrong sought to reassure him.

"Once out of this country," said she, "where she has suffered so much, her health will improve."

And she lectured Louise in private, and administered quinine.

Night came—the night before the wedding. Louise lay on her bed, with her hands clasped over her brow and eyes—eyes that seldom now closed in slumber.

"I shall die. I feel that this is the last night of my life, unless a miracle be wrought to save me! I cannot save myself! I am so feeble—I am a very slave. When I was younger, happier, and stronger, then I suffered myself to be blinded by a moral illusion. Now, that the scales have fallen from my eyes; now that I see how wrong—oh, my God! how deplorably wrong, I have been, it is too late! Louis is lost to me, and, worn out by slavery and suffering, I have no power to resist this marriage—this execution! I shall die! I shall die there before them all, and then Louis will know how I loved—and mother will know how she erred!"

Thus mourned the broken spirit, in its still despair. Sometimes wild impulses would traverse her brain, like forked lightning across a cloudy sky.

"Louis lives—he lives! While there is life there is hope! What hinders me from flying to him now? Because he is not my husband? He *is* my husband—he is! though a million of Legislatures in a thousand halls should have pronounced our divorcement. What hinders me now from flying to him; and, if I die, die on his bosom—if he casts me off—*at his feet!*"

She started up with the impulse, but her head reeled, her limbs failed, and she sunk back upon the bed.

"In vain—in vain! I have no longer the power to execute even my own weak purposes. The hand of Death is suspended over me—ere I be the bride of that man it will fall on me! *Louis only* can save me now! I feel that God has deputed the power of life and death into the hands of Louis. Louis the forsaken! Louis the betrayed! Oh, that Louis would come and save!"

Thus all night the sick heart mourned. Thus all night the wild brain toiled; and morning dawned, and the sun arose, and found the bride feverish, excited, yet pale and faint.

Night came again—the wedding-night. The house was one blaze of illumination. The grounds around it a forest of carriages. The splendid saloons were filled with a brilliant company. Mrs. Armstrong herself never looked so imperial as on this night, when her daughter was to be wedded to an Earl. In truth, Mrs. Armstrong was a very queen-like woman, and stood among her guests as their sovereign, and her imperious eye, lighted with the triumph of pride, shone over the distinguished assembly with an almost youthful brilliancy. Members of the House of Representatives, Senators, members of the Cabinet with their families, foreign Ministers with their suites, were present. The President himself honored the occasion with his presence. Yet the centre of all eyes was Mrs. Armstrong herself, in her matronly grace and majestic beauty.

The arrival of the Right Rev. Bishop H——, in his carriage and canonical robes, caused a sensation. The arrival of the Bishop was soon followed by the entrance of the bridal party—a magnificent spectacle!

I wish I could daguerreotype the following scene, and place it in form and color, vividly before you. I will try.

The wall of the vast saloon was hung with yellow damask, and formed a warm back ground to the picture. Three immense chandeliers hung from the ceiling. The brilliant company that filled this room had fallen back on all sides, leaving a space in the centre of the saloon, immediately under the blaze of the central chandelier. In this broad light stood the Bishop in his canonical robes. On his right hand, at the distance of a few yards, stood Mrs. Armstrong, her majestic form arrayed in a royal purple velvet, her black hair arranged in massive braids, and adorned with a circlet of diamonds and a tuft of white ostrich plumes. She leaned upon the arm of General ———, General-in-Chief of the American army, in his gorgeous uniform. Upon the left of the Bishop stood the British Minister and his suite, in their court-dresses. The bridal party advanced, and arranged itself in a semicircle before this group. The bride was arrayed in a rich white satin, and over that an open robe of gauze, with a deep border of embroidered silver flowers. Her head, her neck, her arms, her stomacher, were literally blazing with diamonds. The *woman* was nearly invisible in the sun-like splendor. To her left ran a line of six young bridesmaids, with their white silk dresses and wreaths of white roses. By her side stood the bridegroom, and on his right a line of six young groomsmen. They were dressed in that elegant gentlemen's wedding costume that needs so little description, viz: the fine blue dress coat, the white satin vest, and kid gloves.

The full light of the chandelier blazed down upon this gorgeous spectacle. It was the focus of the eyes of all that vast company. Some said that the fine aristocratic features of the bridegroom were very pale, like those of a man going to his doom—but that might have been from the contrast of the black silky curls and whiskers that encircled his clear white face. Others said that the bride trembled, and rested languidly upon the arm of her first bridesmaid.

The Bishop opened his book.

A dead silence fell upon the crowd. Their eyes were riveted upon the group. Many noticed the fearful paleness of the bride's face, and saw her lean heavily upon the arm of the bridegroom. The Bishop, in a deep and earnest voice, thus commenced the impressive marriage ceremony:

"Dearly beloved, we are gathered together here in the sight of God, and in the face of this company, to join together this man and this woman in holy matrimony, which is commended by St. Paul to be honorable among all men, and therefore is not by any to be entered into unadvisedly or lightly; but reverently, discreetly, advisedly, soberly, and in the fear of God. Into this holy state these two people come now to be joined. If any man can show just cause why they may not lawfully be joined together, let him now speak, or else hereafter for ever hold his peace."

"I CAN!" shouted a clear, high, imperious voice, and the doors flew open, and Gertrude Lion burst, "a beautiful embodied storm," among them. She, too, in festal garments; a shining dark-blue satin studded with glittering sapphires, and her magnificent hair rolling a golden glory to her feet. Her commanding stature—her glowing color—her blazing eyes—the glory of her imperious brow, might have made the guilty in that crowd deem that an avenging angel stood among them.

Struck statue-still, less by the interruption than by the splendidly beautiful Amazon that made it, the assembled company was held in a spell of silence while they gazed at her.

There she stood in her sublime beauty, radiating a cold splendor, like a sun-struck iceberg.

Only one instant was the crowd held in that spell of wonder-stricken silence, and then a hum of many voices rolled through the crowd, as they exclaimed or inquired of one another, "Who is this?" "What does this mean?" "Ha!" "What!" "How?" "Who is she?"

"SILENCE EVERY ONE OF YOU!" thundered the Amazon, bringing the loaded end of her riding-whip down upon the table with a resounding ring.

"Who is this woman?" asked the Bishop, in a low whisper, of Mrs. Armstrong.

"Oh, a lunatic! a mad woman of the mountains! Arrest her!"

"HOLD YOUR TONGUE, MRS. ARMSTRONG!" shouted the giantess, raising the end of her riding-whip, and making a step towards her, "I am GERTRUDE LION! and you know me; and so does James Frobisher, Earl of Clonmachnois!" said she, fixing her eyes on the bridegroom.

James Frobisher, Earl of Clonmachnois, was standing there, giving his whole attention to the half-fainting bride.

"Leave that man! come to me, Louise!" said Gertrude, in a voice full of commanding tenderness, opening her arms and holding them out to the poor bride, who with an instinctive bound cleared the circle, and fell upon the broad and sheltering breast of the Amazon.

"There, there, there, there, be a good girl," dove-like cooed the Falcon, gently caressing her.

"Young lady," began the Bishop, "will you please to—"

"SHUT UP," snapped the giantess. and then gave her attention to her charge. "There! there! don't weep, Louise, or *I* shall."

"Madam! the assembled company are amazed, confounded at your singular conduct. In their name I demand the meaning of this. Upon what pretence have you arrested this marriage?" asked the Bishop, advancing and standing before her in all the venerableness of his age and office. "I insist instantly upon hearing from your lips from what cause and to what end you have arrested this marriage?"

The Amazon raised her imperious brow, and *looking him steadily* in the eyes, answered, "Because the would-be bride is the wife of another man!"

"How—what!" exclaimed the Bishop.

A thrill of exclamatory astonishment ran through the crowd.

"Madam, you should be very sure of what you advance!" exclaimed the Bishop with solemnity.

"Ask the bride herself. Louise! answer, I command you! Are you the wife of Louis Stuart-Gordon, or not?"

"Oh, I *am!* I *am!* Indeed I *am*, the wife of Louis Stuart-Gordon!"

"You hear her!" said Gertrude, triumphanly.

"She is mad! mad, I say!" exclaimed Mrs. Armstrong, striding forward. "Gentlemen, will *none* of you arrest this mad woman?"

Gertrude threw a glance of mingled triumph and defiance over the astounded crowd. Her eye lighted in its roving upon a new-comer, Louis Stuart-Gordon, pale, travel-stained, and dusty, stood among them.

"Take her, Louis," exclaimed she, tossing her charge into his arms. "Take her, Louis, as my free gift, and swear by the name of Gertrude Lion, henceforth and for evermore, amen! Take her and bear her hence, for I have the devil's own work to do now!"

"An avenging angel's, rather!" replied Louis, receiving the fainting form of Louise in his arms; "an avenging angel's, rather!"

"It amounts to about the same thing," replied Gertrude.

And terrible was the brow that the Gerfalcon now turned towards the assembled company.

"Arrest her! she is mad!" exclaimed Mrs. Armstrong, terror-stricken by the appalling look of the Amazon.

Gertrude raised one hand up, as though appealing to Heaven.

"Hear me, all who are gathered in this house. I denounce Hortense Armstrong as the murderer of Genevieve, the first wife of Dr. Armstrong! I denounce her as having abandoned the eldest child of her husband, and as having concealed and suppressed the will by which that child was acknowledged and constituted the heiress of the half of the Mont Crystal estate! I denounce her as having conspired against the liberty of that child, in having procured her to be sold as a slave! And I appeal to Heaven to confute or corroborate my testimony!" and the avenger raised her hand reverently. * * * * * "BEHOLD! LOOK TO MRS. ARMSTRONG! She is falling!"

Mrs. Armstrong had suddenly dropped to the floor, her throat swollen, her face purple, her whole frame convulsed! She was lifted and borne from the room, and the company broke up in confusion.

* * * * * * *

"A word with you, Gertrude the Destroyer!" commanded the Earl of Clomachnois, beckoning the Amazon to the recess of a bay window. Gertrude, still "vibrating with the thunder" she had spent, followed him, weak as a fainting elephant!

"Terrible denouncer! what have you done! Have you any proofs of what you charge this woman with?"

"Proofs! Every proof that will satisfy my own mind! None, perhaps, that would convict her in a court of justice!"

"Explain!"

"That little girl Zoe, the schoolmaster's adopted child, who was attached at The Lair as the property of Miss Somerville—that same Zoe was the eldest daughter of Dr. Hector Armstrong and Genevieve Somerville, his first wife by a secret marriage. This marriage was concealed to avert the anger of his father and the disinheritance of the son. Genevieve had no proofs of her marriage in her own possession, and the birth of her child was concealed by Harriet, her foster-mother, to save the poor motherless girl from the terrible wrath of her father. This concealment was effected under circumstances inducing the suspicion that Zoe was the child of George and Harriet. By the machinations of Mrs. Armstrong, these circumstances were long afterwards used to procure the attachment of Zoe as a slave, in order that she might be got out of the way! This, however, in advance of my story. Soon after the birth of her child, Genevieve Somerville died suddenly, and under suspicion of *poison*. Soon after *that* event, Miss Blackistone married Dr. Armstrong. He promised Harriet, who was in his confidence, to acknowledge and take home his daughter—a promise that he deferred to perform from time to time—in fact, he stood in awe of his wife. Finally, he died without having performed his promise. Just before he was taken to his bed, he saw Harriet, and told her that he had made a will acknowledging his marriage with Miss Genevieve Somerville, acknowledging her daughter Zoe, and constituting her heiress to half his estates. He said that he was resolved to reveal the whole *matter to his wife*. We believe that he *did*. *But he died*, and no mention was ever made of a will, and no step was taken by his widow to restore his eldest daughter to her rights. If there was a will, as we fully believe there was, Mrs. Armstrong probably destroyed it, with all that could have proved the parentage of Zoe."

"But the servant, then—Harriet! Why did *she* not disclose the secret?"

"Because it would have done every sort of harm, and no good. It would have covered an honest family with shame and confusion, without restoring Zoe to her rights."

"I do not see that."

"Do you not know, then, that, however honest and good they may be, the oath of a slave or other colored person, will not pass in a slave State against a white person? The disclosure would have nearly killed the proud old Major Somerville, because he could not prove the marriage. Therefore Harriet determined to keep the secret, at least until the death of Major Somerville. You know the events that followed that death. Harriet and George were taken for debt; Zoe was attached. It was two months before Harriet and George were redeemed from prison. When they came out, the first thing they heard, with astonishment, was, that Zoe had been attached, but was now at liberty. The first thing they did then was to divulge to Miss Somerville and to Mrs. Stuart-Gordon and myself the secret of Zoe's birth. Then General Stuart-Gordon was admitted to the confidence, and he busied himself in investigating the affair. Being unable to find the clew to any other proofs but those of George and Harriet, it was deemed prudent to take no rash step in the matter, but to watch the course of circumstances, and in the mean time to be as kind as possible to Zoe. And I suppose, with their rascally prudence, they would have 'watched the course of circumstances' to this day, if I had not taken the matter up, and trusted in God for the result."

"Gertrude the Avenger! But this other matter of Mrs. Louis Stuart-Gordon; explain that."

"Mrs. Armstrong, through her omnipotent influence over her daughter, separated her from her husband for no other reason than because General Stuart-Gordon married a second time. Afterwards she effected a divorce, and would have broken her heart, and Louis's heart, and drawn you into the marriage with a woman whom you know very well you only pitied, and did not love, Jamie, if it had not been for me."

"Gertrude the Preserver! Gertrude, I never admired you so much in all my life as this evening."

* * * * * * * *

In the mean time a scene of death was transpiring above stairs. In a thickly curtained room, upon a stately bed, lay the wreck of the haughty and majestic Hortense Blackistone Armstrong, still in her robes of state—a magnificent ruin! The Bishop, still in his canonicals, and another clergyman of the Episcopal faith, stood on one side of the bed; a physician and a surgeon on the other; Louis Stuart-Gordon stood supporting Louise at the foot of the bed. The Bishop, summoned to the house to perform a marriage ceremony, was now reading the solemn service of the dying.

Mrs. Armstrong had never spoken, or given the slightest sign of intelligence from the moment of her fall. Her attack was apoplexy—a disease to which her full habit of body rendered her peculiarly liable. Terrible was the struggle between Death and the strong physical organization he had to conquer! All night long that swollen and purple face was contorted—all night long that strong body was convulsed. It was the dawn of day before that haughty face was composed—before that proud form was still in the rigidity of death—before that imperious spirit had "migrated to the great secret!"

Peace be with her! We do not know whether or not she were guilty of the worst crimes laid to her charge, since nothing but strong circumstantial evidence rested against her. We heard her accusation—we heard not her defence. She was struck speechless and powerless! Let us judge her leniently, or leave her with her God!

Immediately after the funeral, Louis and Louise Stuart-Gordon returned to The Isle of Rays. Though the papers of Mrs. Armstrong were diligently searched, no vestige of a will or of a marriage certificate, or of any other paper identifying Zoe, as the legitimate daughter of Dr. Armstrong, could be found. Her fate rested upon the generosity of Mr. and Mrs. Louis Stuart-Gordon, who at once acknowledged her as a sister, and settled one-half of the Mont Crystal property upon her.

Among the papers of the deceased, however, were found some letters, dated near Richmond, Virginia, and touching the health and well-being of a certain little child, Margaret, there at nurse. Simultaneously struck with a wild hope, Louis and Louise hastened to the village, and found there, with more joy than surprise, their beloved child, Margaret, now a brave little girl of three years old.

It was clear that Mrs. Armstrong had practised this deception to effect the divorce. It was not certainly known whether she ever meant to reproduce the heiress, but it was thought probable.

Some months from this time a double wedding was celebrated at the Island mansion, and the county papers the next day announced the two following marriages, one immediately under the other.

MARRIED,

On May 1st, at The Isle of Rays, the seat of his Excellency Governor Stuart-Gordon, by the Rev. Wilton Lindslay, pastor of the Church of the Transfiguration, the Right Honorable James Frobisher, Earl of Clonmachnois, to Gertrude, only daughter of the late Wolfgang Lion.

At the same time and place, Brutus Lion, Esq., of The Lair, to Zoe, eldest daughter of the late Dr. Hector Armstrong, of Mont Crystal.

Brutus Lion and Zoe reside at Mont Crystal; Louis and Louise of course remain at The Isle of Rays, with Brighty and the General.

A year from this time, Wilton Lindslay and Susan Somerville were married; and in the attractive duties of wife, mother, and pastor's helpmate, for all the sorrows of her early youth, Susan Somerville found rich compensation.

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MARIE LOUISE;

OR,

THE OPPOSITE NEIGHBORS.

Part the First.

CHAPTER I.

On, on, my good brown steed,
And ply thy hoofs with speed!
WADMAN.

ARL!"

r. Engineer!"*

id you say the chaise was ready?"

es, sir, I did say so—and have said so s than four times already," replied Carl, blew his frozen fingers.

ell, then, be so good as to say so for the ime, when you have buckled the port-eau and set the carpet-bag to-rights."

er saying these words, Carl's master, the g surveyor, William Williamson, turning s two young assistants, with whom he aking a parting meal, and with a slight iption of dignity in his tone, said, "Yes, iends, we take leave of each other for ear, but by next spring you will again full employment with me, for, thanks to I have received commissions for several rtant works; and in drinking this part-lass together, my friends, we will hope we may pass next summer as pleasantly last. If we have shared in a little hard work now and then, we have also had our pleasant hours occasionally." And after this toast followed several others, and amongst them the good wishes of the young men for the happy settlement of the engineer in the little town to which he was going: until at last, Carl, with a discontented face, appeared for the sixth and last time upon the threshold.

"Yes, yes, I see; it is time that I started. Here, then, give me my cloak and fur!"

After our engineer had shaken hands with the two young men, and had patted his hostess on both shoulders, he jumped into the chaise which stood at the door, at the same time that Carl seated himself beside him.

"What is the matter, my good fellow? Have you lost your tongue?" said the engineer, as he took the reins from the hands of his attendant.

"No wonder I should lose my tongue. Mr. Engineer has been sitting within there in warmth and comfort, whilst I was out here all the while, half frozen to death," replied Carl, with a familiarity that he was accustomed to assume.

"Very wisely said, brother Carl. It is quite right that, when I forget you, you should not forget yourself. Come, I will sit here and freeze in your place, whilst you run in and get a glass of beer and stick a bit of bread and cheese in your pocket. You may also bring a little oat cake for the bay. You see, he is too high-minded to complain. But make haste, or you know I can find means to warm you in case of need."

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the following tale, the hero, who is a land sur- evidently holds the title of "Engineer," either ast military service, or from being connected he Swedish government as civil engineer. In n, as in Germany, all titles, and the names of ions, are used in addressing a person, preceded —as Mr. Doctor, Mr. Postmaster, Mr. Engineer, A few minutes later, and the green chaise of the young engineer rattled over the court-yard, the ground of which was hard with the autumn frost.

CHAPTER II.

I came, I sought, I found.
LASTADIUS.

The sun shines brightly in,
And warmth prevails around;
No pomp or pride is seen,
But comfort there is found.
WADSTRÖM.

THE four tallow candles in the town club-room were already lighted. Some of the members had seated themselves at the card-table; others read the advertisements, and others consoled themselves with a pipe and glass of toddy, until their turn came for these amusements. In the little parlor behind sat Mistress Elmgren, the patroness of the club, spreading bread and butter, which the gentlemen, in default of a waiter, fetched themselves or eat by the side of their hostess, who, at times, invited her most intimate acquaintances to take a glass of what she called a "cold exterminator," or ale posset.

The only "rose of the cellar," the red-cheeked Lotta, was in the act of crossing the threshold of the little parlor with a bowl of ale posset in her hands, when an important event occurred—namely, the stoppage of a carriage before the door of the inn. It had been so long since any stranger had come into the town, that it was quite excusable in both guests and hostess peeping behind the window-curtains, in order to see, with the help of the moon, who could be without so late.

"Goodness me, Mistress Elmgren! and the guest-chamber stove has never been lighted!" exclaimed Lotta, quite in dismay.

"You goose!" replied her mistress. "Do you think I would waste my wood so foolishly as to heat the guest-chamber stove, when not more than two or three travellers come in a month? No, indeed! if people do not choose to come oftener, they must put up with what we can manage for them when they do come. But go and light the gentleman in—he can come and stay a little while in the parlor here."

The traveller was no other than our young surveyor, who, though little acquainted with the town in which he was taking refuge, yet preferred spending his winter there, rather than in the country. "When one is sociably disposed oneself," thought he, "one soon finds society enough;" and as Williamson was an agreeable young man, it was probable that his expectations would be fulfilled.

"I find," said the town-counsellor Utter, after conversing some time with the stranger, and then approaching Mistress Elmgren's round table in the back parlor, "I find that my good cousin has no warm room up stairs, so perhaps the young gentleman had better come over to us, as it so happens that my brother-in-law has lately been with us, and our upper rooms are well aired."

"Take him away with you, cousin Utter," said the landlady, smiling; "I am not one of those who cannot grant a little favor to another." The true cause of her readiness to oblige arising, however, from Mistress Elmgren well knowing by experience, that travellers who only remain one night in the house bring more trouble than profit.

"*A la bonne heure!*" said Williamson, as the counsellor, amid many compliments, brought forward his proposal; "and if the rooms should suit me, I shall gladly retain them for a longer period."

"Cousin Utter! cousin Utter!—Counsellor Utter!" cried Mistress Elmgren, suddenly changing her mind. It was only a joke of mine—you can well understand, cousin Utter, that when the room is once well warmed, I should not—but, cousin Utter, do you not hear?"

Cousin Utter took care not to hear. He hastened, on the contrary, to secure his booty, and as Mistress Elmgren ran into the club-room after them to assert her rights, nothing of the counsellor and the guest was to be seen, but the stick of the former and the whip of the latter.

"Well, this is what one gets when one is good-natured to one's friends," thundered out our hostess. "They are not ashamed to carry off travellers from under one's very nose! Very soon they will be lying in wait for them before the door—such contemptible company as comes to this house!" The burden of Mistress Elmgren's song was always a lament over the company which frequented her inn, a lament which she now meant as a fine stroke at the burgomaster, who, seated at the solitary card-table of the club-room, seemed, however, as if he saw and heard nothing.

Counsellor Utter leading the way, our engineer with all his possessions—the bay horse, Carl, the chaise, and his luggage were transported across the market-place to what was called Strand Street, in which the house of the Utters stood. As far as the moonlight would permit him to distinguish objects, it appeared to Williamson as if his future dwelling, with the little flower-border three ells wide on each side of the steps, would please him well.

"Mother!" cried the counsellor, as he tapped at the door; "Mother! come with a light and open the door. We have a stranger guest here."

Mops, the dog, barked; the door was opened, and on the threshold appeared a good-tempered, comfortable-looking matron in a clean starched apron, white folded neckerchief, and finely crimped cap on her venerable head.

The counsellor's wife courtseyed low, and walked backwards with the light so as to show the way, and the stranger was soon seated on the sofa at the end of her parlor.

"This young gentleman is the Engineer Williamson, mother," said the counsellor, presenting him. "He would certainly have found the inn so very cold, that I let drop a word about our rooms."

"They are quite at his service," answered the old woman, heartily.

Williamson made up his mind at once, and seizing her hand, said quickly: "My good Mistress Utter, you see in me a young man desirous of settling in this town, my business in summer lying in the neighboring district. As the few friends I have in the world are very far off, I intend to try and supply their place among the good neighbors here; and as I am a straight-forward man, with my heart on my lips, I will frankly own that all I see around pleases me so well, that I would gladly stay here."

"If that is the case," answered the old lady, much flattered, "I feel sure we shall become good friends; for when we old people are childless, there is nothing pleasanter than to have an agreeable inmate—but is Mr. Engineer quite alone then?"

"No indeed, my good lady! I come three men strong; that is to say, I have a horse and a servant with me; but both of an excellent race, so that I must beg of you to give them shelter as soon as possible."

"Oh, I have given my orders already," said the counsellor, who at these words, came back from a mission to the kitchen.

"Yes, but see you, with horses there is always some difficulty," said his wife, turning uneasily to him; "and as to men-servants, I will say nothing worse of them than that they belong to the horses. I know that the masters mean no harm, but it is very certain that the lieutenant who lived here last winter had a servant who squandered the money given him for fodder, and then helped himself out of our hay-rack, so that when spring came, I was obliged to feed my best milk cow with miserable chopped straw. You may imagine, Mr. Engineer, what sort of milk I got, so that I was obliged to give up my best customers."

"Oh, that I call encroaching beyond the bounds of hospitality," cried Williamson, assuming a look of extraordinary surprise, although he could not conceal from himself that Carl was capable of anything rather than let the bay horse hunger. Yet, far from acknowledging such a possibility, our engineer added, with confidence: "But, my good Mistress Utter, permit me to explain to you, that I am a tolerably orderly man, and look after my horse myself, and I shall lay in such an abundant supply of hay, that Carl will have no need to commit depredations."

"Yes, yes, my good Mr. Engineer! But,"—and the old lady shook her head; "I have a great prejudice against men-servants. They are always so self-willed."

"Upon my honor, Carl has not this fault. He is the most obliging fellow that ever cleaned boots. As to my horse, he is good manners itself; and it will give me great pleasure to drive Mistress Utter to church, as soon as the snow is hard enough for sledging, and should, by chance, a ride be agreeable—to the mill, for instance."

"Ah! Mr. Engineer is really too good! you cannot resist him; I see that very plainly, mother," interrupted the counsellor. "And after all, our black cow has quite as good flesh on her bones now as before the attack on the hay-rack."

"Nothing more need be said about it," added the old lady, now quite vanquished, especially by the pleasing prospect of how smart she would look in muff and fur tippet, driving up to the church on Sunday,—"Nothing more need be said about it."

And now for the inspection of the apartments. The upper floor of the Utters' house consisted of, besides their own sitting-room, two roomy chambers, and a little closet that the engineer immediately assigned to Carl. The outer room was covered with a bright-colored carpet, which gave it a lively air. It was called the parlor, and was furnished in a style betokening respectability and a simple taste. Most pleasant of all, however, was the sleeping-room, with its cheerful bow-window, which almost formed a separate little cabinet, or rather conservatory, as in it the counsellor kept the plants which, in winter time, were brought in out of the garden, and for which there was no room in the parlor. Near the window stood the bed, with white hangings over brass poles. A fire on the hearth welcomed the new lodger, and all was well dusted and scoured.

The engineer felt himself quite at home. From time to time he pressed the hand of his host, as he ran to and fro and examined everything, even to the corner cupboard and wardrobe.

"Yes; thank God it is as it is," said the old counsellor, much delighted. "When I and my old woman married, this little dwelling was only one story high, and had been so in the time of my father and grandfather. But Gretchen, my old wife, was so troubled not to have an upper floor, like the rest of her neighbors, that I gave in to it for the sake of peace."

"And were you not right glad afterwards, good father?" asked Mistress Utter, looking kindly at the old man.

"Ay, indeed! it was downright pretty. But, Mr. Engineer, believe me, Rome was not built in a day. One year the walls were built; the next, they were fitted up inside; in a third, we got the furniture together; and in the fourth and last, as we wanted to have everything finished by Christmas, the good mother, with her own hands, made all the covers to the furniture and cushions, and arranged the curtains and carpets herself. Then we gave a feast, and had the burgomaster and the provost, and many other friends; and on this our second wedding day, as we called it, we were right merry, Mr. Engineer, for Gretchen and I had then been married five-and-twenty years."

"And we will hope that you will celebrate a not less merry 'golden wedding,'"* said the engineer, in a friendly tone. "But to return again to our business, I have a proposal to make which I must with propriety address to Mistress Utter, since I know that on these points the ladies have the casting vote. Would it not be possible that I and my servant should also board here? I know of nothing more tiresome in a little town than to have to dine at an eating-house, where it is the same as dining alone. And nothing is more disagreeable than to miss any of the comforts of home when one is engaged over work requiring close attention."

This proposal was quickly assented to, and in the course of a few hours our surveyor, with bag and baggage, was comfortably established in his new abode.

"Now, Carl, what do you think of all this?" asked Williamson, as Carl assisted him to pull off his boots.

"I think, Master, that all will be beautiful," answered Carl, with an air of satisfaction. "I got such excellent porridge for supper, that our old hostess in the country would have jumped for joy to see how white it was. And, if I may venture to boast, I was as brisk as a perch after it, and cleaned the knives and snuffers till they shone like the sun in Carlstadt."

"Good! I know how you can speechify about your own talents, my fine fellow. Only take care that my boots shine as bright as Mrs. Utter's snuffers. And mind also, that if the coffee comes up too early to-morrow morning, beg them very politely to keep it warm until I am awake, and if this is not before nine o'clock, you may wake me yourself—and now be off with you!"

When the engineer, on the following morning, at about eleven o'clock, went down stairs to join his hosts, he found that the counsellor, after waiting long at the breakfast-table, had departed to the council room, and the former friendly countenance of the old lady showed two decided wrinkles over the eyebrow.

"My good young gentleman," said she, in a kind but right mother-like tone of reproof, "we keep house after the old fashion, and if Mr. Engineer wishes to become a guest at our table, he must keep our hours. In winter we always take our coffee at seven o'clock, and at half-past nine is our breakfast hour. At one o'clock we dine, and sup at eight o'clock in the evening."

"But, my dear Mrs. Utter, did I not arrive after my journey last night tired and frozen, and do I not deserve a little mitigation of the punishment I see threatening me? When I am regularly at work, I usually take my morning coffee as early even as six o'clock; and if at dinner-time I should not be at home at the right hour, I must beg of you not to wait for me."

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* *In Sweden, Germany, &c.,* the fiftieth anniversary *of a wedding is so called.*

"Well, well! it was not badly meant," rejoined the old lady, appeased by his friendly tone. "A quarter of an hour we could always wait, so now come and sit down and make yourself comfortable;" and as she spoke, she opened the door of the stove, and brought out a smoking hot cutlet.

CHAPTER III.

> Where'er thou turn'st thy steps,
> Greetings and open arms await thee.
> DAHLGREN.

AT last everything was arranged.

With Carl's assistance the portmanteau was emptied, and its contents dusted and laid in a nice wardrobe. Maps were hung all around on the walls, and the writing table, which, during the first week, changed its situation at least ten times a day, had at last its appointed place in the recess of the deep bow-window, where the light was best suited for working.

Amongst other business to transact, it was also necessary that the engineer should pay his calls at all the most respectable houses of the town, and his efforts to secure a little friendly intercourse were crowned by four invitations. In a short time he had taken tea at the burgomaster's, the doctor's, the rector's, and the postmaster's. A young, handsome, and agreeable man, of good manners and lively disposition, in a town where daughters are more numerous than sons, is soon liked, and sought after. Nothing was talked of in the whole place but the agreeable Engineer Williamson, who at the postmaster's tea-party had worn his uniform, whilst at the burgomaster's he had been dressed in black; and the old counsellor's lady, who received a gentle hint to reveal whether this remarkable circumstance arose out of a decided inclination for the postmaster's daughter, Henrietta, was obliged to declare (and as a matter of course, no one believed her) that Carl had only forgotten that evening to fetch his master's black coat from the tailor's, where it had been sent to have the lining mended.

This was thought to be only an invention to conceal the truth. Such a man—a perfect angel of a man, to have a torn lining to his coat. No—heaven forbid! The putting on of the uniform on an occasion when it was neither a christening, a wedding, nor a funeral, was nothing more nor less than an open declaration in favor of the postmaster's family.

Now, our hero was not unaware of the importance which was attached to his person in this good little town, but he never dreamed that it went so far as that, through Carl's accidental negligence, he should be placed on the town list of suitors; especially as he was not conscious of having given any lady the preference, with the exception of two blooming married ladies, whom he considered the most distinguished ornaments of the circle. Williamson's mind had ever been too open to poetry and joy for him not to have nourished impressions received in childhood, which could not easily be mingled with feelings of a lighter kind. He had, besides, been accustomed to pursue his profession with earnestness, and as he now felt that he was beginning to spend too much time in society, he wisely resolved to make up the loss with renewed diligence, so that he might not be sensible of being in arrears.

"Take the key out of the door, Carl," said he; "and let who come that will, I am not at home. Do you understand?"

Three days long he worked after his old manner, and without allowing himself any other distraction than now and then casting a glance across the streets to an opposite bow-window. On the first day he remarked that he had a neighbor, and perceived in a fugitive glance the outline of an old lady's head. On another day, as he stood at his window mending a pen, he fancied he perceived something noble in the countenance, which inspired him with a feeling of reverence, and irresistibly he smiled at the old lady, who was busy folding up certain things in paper. He could not decide what it was, but afterwards discovered that it was cakes of chocolate, which, after being very carefully prepared, were sent for sale into the town. On the third day—for the engineer was an admirer of fine old women's faces—he could not resist making a sort of acquaintance with her, by bowing respectfully over his table, a politeness which the inhabitant of the opposite bow-window (who was not so very old either) returned with an inclination of the head.

Good resolutions, however, cannot last for ever. Williamson began to find out, that in a little town, where one has made a number of acquaintances, it is not so easy to get on with business as when in the retirement of the country, where, in winter, work becomes almost an amusement. He could not conceal from himself an inclination to make an exception to Carl's orders with regard to visitors, and the end of it was that the engineer, on the fourth, fifth, and sixth days of his first week's work, found it would be impolite to decline the visits or invitations of this or that good friend; and at last came the discovery that so much night-work injured eyes.

This unusual circumstance could not occur to a person overwhelmed with work without some portion of his business being neglected, which, to one who had won great confidence for punctuality, might become serious in its consequences; and as Williamson remarked that he would soon be behindhand, he began to look out for some poor fellow to whom he would be a most welcome benefactor, in giving him a part of his labor to perform, were it only copying writing or coloring maps.

"Perhaps you may happen to know some one, Counsellor Utter, who writes a good fine hand?" asked the engineer, the next time he fell in with his host. "I have undertaken so much work just now that I am in want of an assistant."

"The old organist writes pretty well if he had time; but he is rather slow. And we have a reduced tradesman here too, who is glad of something to do when he can get it: but to tell the truth, he is rather given to drinking, so that one could not entrust anything of importance to him."

"Then, is there, in Heaven's name, no poor but respectable soul to whom such a thing would be a favor?" for Williamson wanted, if possible, to find, in the certainty of assisting a fellow-creature, an excuse for himself and his own reproaches, when he remembered the advice of his beloved and deceased mother, "never to forget how necessary is work in youth to lay the foundation of comforts in old age, and that no prosperity tastes sweeter, or bears better fruit, than that which one creates for oneself through noble industry."

"Yes indeed, there is," answered the counsellor, smiling at his zeal. "There is just the person you mean, when I come to think of it, and not far from here either—only, were Mr. *Engineer to try* ever so long, he would never guess who it is in our town who writes quickest and has the most beautiful hand."

"Well, tell me who is this treasure—some private secretary from Stockholm, perhaps, who has wandered out of his way here."

"A secretary? Yes, yes, something of the kind," laughed the counsellor. "Or rather a secretary-*ess*. She has actually gone through many a thick manuscript already for the burgomaster and fiscal."

"What! a lady?"

"Yes, a lady, and, moreover, the neighbor of Mr. Engineer, in the opposite bow."

"That nice lady."

"So, so; Mr. Engineer has already, I see, made a discovery. But it is not the old lady, for she knows no use in paper but to spoil it with her old chocolate cakes. But look you, the daughter, 'the beauty of the bow-window,' as we call her, she knows what is the use of a quire of paper. She can not only write it full without smearing the edges, but she can mount paper beautifully, and draw flowers and patterns on it, which the clever little lady copies from the plants that I raise in my garden out there."

"Oh, my dear good counsellor, this is indeed quite a net-full of news," exclaimed the engineer, quite pleased. "An idea has come into my head. If this beautiful young lady is so clever in drawing patterns, I would wager that she could also copy and color my maps."

"Yes, I will answer for it that she can do whatever she likes. There is but one difficulty, which is, that she is not at home at present. She went some weeks ago to a fine house in the country, where she gives lessons in drawing, but she will soon come home, I fancy."

"And this beautiful unknown is called——"

"Marie Louise N——. Her father was a poor captain, who, to use an old proverb, always 'carried his head under his arm,' and left his widow in necessitous circumstances. But she herself was, in her youth, a genteel and well brought-up young lady, and only through the rogue Cupid was led into marrying the blustering fellow, against the will of her relations. So she lost the grand relations of whom she boasts at times, but there was left her a good portion of reason and knowledge; and as she is a very good mother, she has contrived to give both of these to her daughter, and it is the young girl who principally provides their little income."

"But does not the mother make chocolate?" said Williamson, in a tone which showed the sympathy he had already began to feel for this "poor family."

"Certainly, certainly she cannot sit there with her hands in her lap, whilst the young lady, like an angel, works for two. And the chocolate, although I never drink such stuff, is right good, at least so Gretchen says, who understands these kind of things."

"And has Heaven sent no lover to such a clever young maiden?"

"Yes, indeed, she might have been betrothed and married, too, by this time, were she not so hard to please, for it must be owned that she has a touch of the fine lady about her; and, in confidence, I must tell you (but let no one hear a word about it) that the doctor and the apothecary have both received 'baskets,'* before they were accepted elsewhere. The most wonderful part of the affair, however, is that one of her relations, on her father's side, a good respectable steady fellow—he drives six pair of oxen to our yearly market—even he has had a 'basket.' We call him the yearly suitor, for he always comes in his chaise behind the oxen, and after paying his addresses each time, returns home with a long face."

"That I admire," added the engineer, with emphasis. "A poor maiden who disdains to become a rich lady, has character. Labor will to her be no hardship."

"No, that one may very well say, and one sees that it is so. She blooms like one of my finest roses in the middle of summer."

After this conversation Williamson's looks wandered ten times in the quarter of an hour from his own window towards that of his opposite neighbor. But he could discover no rose. "She may nevertheless be at home without letting herself be seen at the window —but I will soon ascertain that. Carl!"

"Mr. Engineer!"

"Run over to Mistress N——, who lives over the way, and buy six of her cakes of chocolate."

Carl was already in the outer room, when, as if accidentally, he was called back again.

"Stop! I remember something else I want. Ask whether a person does not live there who would undertake writing. I have heard of some one there who can do it."

After this the engineer drew his curtains down, and, hidden behind them, his eye placed at a little hole, which he had accidentally torn after the interesting discovery, and which hole was hidden in a deep fold on any chance visit of Mistress Utter, he stood in ambush, to watch the result of Carl's mission.

The lady of the opposite "bow" did not this day sit at the window, which early that morning had been furnished with clean white curtains. Although Williamson, in defiance of the reproaches to be expected from his hostess, widened considerably the hole in the curtain, it was all in vain. Nothing had been seen to move at the window, when Carl sprung back over the street.

"Well?" asked the engineer, and raised his eyes from his papers, whilst he pretended to be very busy with them.

"I am to fetch the chocolate to-morrow, She says she has none ready."

"And the copying?—that you have evidently forgotten."

"No; I thought of it, and am to have an answer about it also to-morrow."

"That is right! To-day I will be undisturbed, and work. Lock the door, and remember I am at home to no one to-day."

Williamson added one fact to the other. The clean window-curtains, and the circumstance that he was to have an answer to-morrow, plainly showed that Marie Louise N—— would return to-day.

Our hero said to himself, that it was in the highest degree absurd to let these trifles interest him, and withdraw his attention from other thoughts; but on the other hand, it was pardonable that a young man should rejoice at the prospect of seeing a pretty neighbor of whom he had heard so much good. When he had once seen her the fever would be soon allayed.

The day and the evening, however, passed over without any carriage stopping at his neighbor's door, and only when the engineer was in bed, and had, with a feeling of vexation, put out his light and turned to the wall, did the rattle of wheels fall on his ear. "Those who like may look at her now," said he, with stoical indifference; yet he raised himself, nevertheless, to see whether Carl had not forgotten to draw the curtains. Carl had positively forgotten them.

In the opposite bow-window they had not been so negligent. As it was, however, brightly lighted up, whilst the engineer's room was in darkness, he had the indescribable pleasure of seeing a slender and delicate shadow coming and going with all sorts of graceful movements. "What a charming height!" thought Williamson; "and what lightness, what grace in the movements."

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* To get a basket, is to be refused.

It is acknowledged by all to be more dangerous to contemplate the phantom of a woman through curtains, than to see her with the naked eye at an open window. The engineer did not get to sleep until two hours after it had been all dark at his neighbor's on the other side of the way.

CHAPTER IV.

Alas! already am I borne
To the Graces' native home.
FRANZEN.

"YOUNG people are never regular," said the counsellor, who, whilst he walked backwards and forwards between the breakfast table and the door, cast impatient looks towards the clock on the wall. Sentence was to be passed this day over a thief who had stolen a saucepan out of the postmaster's kitchen, and the counsellor could not encroach on the hour for attending the sessions in order to wait for the gentleman on the upper floor.

"I esteem him because he is kind-hearted," said Mistress Utter, "but old-fashioned people—"

"My worthy hostess! It is not my fault, but that scoundrel Carl's, who forgot to pull down the curtains, and this morning has gone off the devil knows where! Just imagine, Mistress Utter, as I awoke I saw a lady's arm at the opposite window; and as I could guess that there must be more than a mere arm, my modesty would not permit me to begin my toilette with no curtains before the windows."

The counsellor laughed, but his wife asked, smiling, how the engineer had got over the difficulty?

"Why, just imagine!" stammered out Williamson, "not till Carl— No! now I remember, it was the lady who drew *her* curtains down."

The old lady shook her finger at him. "Yes, yes, my good engineer! It is well that you have Carl to lay the blame on! But, in confidence, let me tell you, that this fine gentleman has, in several respects, an inclination to be negligent. I tell you, Mr. Engineer, you are too good to him."

"It is possible," answered Williamson, "that *I look at him through* my fingers; but he is also a very good-hearted fellow. Should he, however, incur the displeasure of Mistress Utter, it shall cost him dear."

"Oh, ho! I shall preach him a sermon when it is necessary,—but, look you, actually! there goes Miss Marie Louise! It must have been she who came home last night."

The old lady began to nod with all her might, and hid behind her, looking over her shoulder, Williamson saw, for the first time, the remarkably pretty face of Marie Louise N——, as she returned with a graceful bow the greeting of her neighbours.

"Yes, indeed, she is beautiful," said Williamson to himself, as he stood there; and he repeated it afterwards, as from his window he saw her as she returned the same forenoon. "Beautiful as Heaven knows what—but—"

This "but" he could not well explain to himself, and it presented itself again on the following evening, when he had the pleasure of meeting the young lady at a little party at one of his town acquaintances. Until now, Williamson had never found himself deficient in either words or confidence in approaching either a married woman or a young single lady. But when Marie Louise, among the latest of the guests—as if she were quite another person from the poor girl of the bow-windowed room working for her bread,—as she entered, greeting right and left, and at a sign from the hostess took her seat at her side, her bright-colored and stiff chintz dress spread out as if it were of silk,—there was something in the whole of her appearance, her upright figure, and well-turned head—in these greetings, and in the very spreading out of her dress, on whose outermost fold rested a small glove and laced handkerchief,—there was something in all this that held Williamson back from approaching her at first. For the first time, it seemed as if it would be very bold to make acquaintance with her without further introduction. He almost blushed as he thought that he had wished this beautiful, and, certainly, proud young girl, to sit down and copy out fair his stupid scribblings.

Whilst Williamson was conversing with one of the gentlemen, he placed himself so that he could listen to Marie Louise's voice, who was giving the ladies a description of her journey, and the pleasure it gave her, and especially her joy at returning back to her little home and her good mother.

"You have got a new neighbor, Marie Louise," whispered one of the ladies.

"Yes, so I hear. The Utters have taken a lodger."

"A very agreeable, extremely well-educated young man."

"Indeed," said Marie Louise.

In this simple word there lay no expression of either doubt or contradiction of the assertion made; but so entirely was it without signification, that there was something disagreeable in it, and Williamson, who, with one ear, had been listening to the conversation at the ladies' table, actually burned with vexation. He could not exactly assert that he was a perfectly well-educated man, but he thought himself something of the kind, and could not imagine what cause he could have given for the "indeed" of the young lady—unless—Ah! how stupid—now he had got it; it must be the message through Carl about the copying. He ought to have managed it in quite a different way. Still, how could he have imagined that his neighbor, instead of being the pretty coquette, he had thought her, should make her appearance as a young lady of the most "presentable" kind?

Without well knowing how it happened, Williamson found himself seated in a part of the room where the ladies were at work, and where the hostess now presented the Engineer Williamson to Marie Louise N——, with the *naïve* remark, "One may feel sure that the engineer must have already seen his beautiful opposite neighbor."

"To my knowledge, I have not yet had the honor," answered Williamson, who had not sufficiently recovered himself to tell the truth.

"Nay, only listen to that—what a rogue!—he wants to make game of us experienced old people. When I look Engineer Williamson in the face,—and just now, too, as I look at his blushes, and say that he has already seen the young lady, what will his conscience reply?"

"That I cannot exactly say, but it could be proved, no doubt, that a lady is never in the wrong, except when it pleases her to place a gentleman in the critical situation of having either to tell an untruth, or to contradict where he ought to agree."

"Ah—there we have him fast," said the hostess, laughing, "and believe him who will. However, let us proclaim peace on this subject in the name of politeness. Tell us now, Mr. Engineer, whether you are a good hand at boston, as, in that case, I shall enlist your services?"

"Alas! my good lady, I am unfortunately a good hand at nothing, and least of all in card-playing, in which I can scarcely even call myself a learner."

"Nonsense—we will do our best to put the burgomaster's wife out of countenance."

"But I assure you that——"

"I assure you that these are only excuses, in order that you may stay to amuse yourself with the young ladies. But really, Mr. Engineer, you must play the first game with me."

"At your commands;" and Williamson, who had not been able to speak a word to the young lady to whom he had been introduced, was obliged to allow himself to be carried off by the old lady, who laughed heartily over her triumph. After two mortally long hours, the moment of liberation came at last. The lady allowed herself to be satisfied that his place should be taken by her former admirer, an old assessor.

Williamson left his seat with delight, and let nothing prevent him from sitting down by the side of Marie Louise. Yet a tie was on his tongue, so that he began by looking at her work as it lay on the table.

Marie Louise was embroidering a pair of cuffs, which were universally admired.

"I cannot think how you can do such fine work by candlelight," said one of her intimate acquaintances; "I mean that your eyes must have suffered from drawing and writing so much."

"Oh, I cannot say that; embroidery tries the sight still more in the long run."

"Have you much to write at present?"

"Just at this moment, nothing."

Williamson's blood ran quicker. Should he consider that this was said in order to let him know that his wishes could be complied with, no other answer having yet been sent to his message? Perhaps! yet certainly it would be quite improper for them to say anything now on the matter. Some subject must however be broached. Yet only with the greatest difficulty could he conquer the shyness which this evening overcame him.

"You are lately returned from a long journey, I believe?"

"Oh, not a very long one. It was only a little visit to some acquaintances; and in the mean time our little society has gained an additional member."

Williamson bowed, but the glance which he expected to have met from the young lady's eyes, passed by him. He fancied that he perceived a flash from the most beautiful of shooting stars; but it must have been a mistake, for Marie Louise looked with indifference down at her work again.

Her cotton ball rolled to the ground without any assistance from coquetry, and as Williamson attempted to pick it up, he was very near knocking his head against that of an equally officious young clerk. At last he succeeded in handing her the ball.

"It is a naughty little thing," said Marie Louise, as she thanked him, "and" (drawing out her work-bag) "we had better put it in here." Williamson blushed again. Why had he not laid the ball on the table, instead of giving it to herself? "She is a coquette," was his first remark. "And I am playing the part of a very calf," was his second.

After supper, the Counsellor Utter and the host took out their violins. They had played together many duets in their youth, but were willing now to play dance music for the young people.

"She will at least accept my hand as a partner," thought Williamson, and went straight up to Marie Louise and begged for the honor of a waltz with her.

Marie Louise stood up and laid the tips of her fingers on his, but so lightly, that he seemed only to touch her glove.

A waltz can be made a very confidential dance. During many a one had Williamson in his gallantry whispered all kinds of pretty things in his partner's ear; but in this case, the old tone would not answer. To be sure his arm lay round the young girl's waist—to be sure he looked on her lovely face, rosy with warmth and youthful activity, and more than once it happened that her curls were wafted near enough to touch his own—and yet—in her looks lay much soul, but no spark of excitement. The waltz began and ended, without anything more than a couple of syllables being exchanged between them. A part of the company escorted Marie Louise to her own door, and Williamson gained an opportunity for taking leave of her. "We are neighbors," said he, for he feared not to get out something—"may I venture to take the liberty——?"

"The ill health of my mother," replied the young girl, drawing back, "and, I must own, her circumstances also, make it almost a duty *to deny herself* the pleasure of hospitality. *In case, however,* that you have business"—she blushed, and her eyes, half raised to his, were quickly cast down—"we are at home every morning—at least mamma." She bowed politely, and vanished.

"So, so!" murmured Williamson, whilst he mounted the steps to his own apartments; "I call that cutting the matter short very unceremoniously. Yes, she *is* beautiful, but—but—"

Carl was fast asleep on a chair in the outer room, and although he roused himself directly, half drunk with sleep, it happened—which had not come to pass for a long time (as he was allowed to pass his time as he liked whilst sitting up for his master)—that he felt, to his great astonishment, his back tingle with the powerful hand of the engineer.

"You negligent rascal! am I to break my shins in the dark here?"

Carl lighted a candle without saying a word. He was too well trained not to see how matters stood. The engineer went into his sleeping room.

"What is all this about? How come my curtains to be down when it's bright moonlight?"

"You threatened to box my ears the last time that I forgot to draw them down."

"There was no moon that night, stupid head!"

"Yes, indeed; but to-night it is not so very bright——"

"No arguing! Draw the curtains up; but to-morrow morning early you must draw them down again. Do you hear?"

"Very well, sir; only be so good in future to let me know when you wish it otherwise."

"Be off with you!"

Williamson laid himself down in the so-called moonlight, which resembled very closely the celebrated Stockholm "police moonshine;" but it was impossible to sleep, since, for at least two hours longer, a light was burning opposite, and the outlines of a form that he well recognized was to be seen through the curtain. She was busy at the table in the bow-window; but what she was doing he could not see.

"She is so poor, that she is obliged to work far into the night—and yet proud, as if she were the heiress of millions."

CHAPTER V.

By Heaven man was never meant to be a slave,
When freedom of the will to him it gave;
And the heart's pastures, ne'er in gloomy night,
Grow desolate, when cheered by duty's light.
Euphrosyne.

"Marie Louise, my dear child, do not sit up any longer; it is past one o'clock. It is some time since I heard the watchman's call."

"Ah! if you could only go to sleep, mamma!" Marie Louise turned to the side where her mother's bed, with its large-flowered curtains, stood in a recess. She and her mother, like their neighbor, had two rooms, but in winter they could only use one.

"I cannot sleep whilst you are sitting up."

"Then I must go to bed, dear mamma, although you know that I have promised Baroness Segerstad to get the cap and cuffs finished by next week; and besides, to-night I am not in the least sleepy."

"Well, then, let us chat a little, which is just as good as pretending to be asleep when I am awake. Was it pleasant this evening at the Lundens', my love?"

"Oh, pretty well—nothing particular."

"You saw the Utters' new lodger, did you not; I guess that he must have been there?"

"Yes, of course."

"Is he a respectable young man? He seems at a distance, as far as I can judge, both good-looking and nice."

"Yes; and I think he loses nothing when one sees him nearer."

"Did he speak to you?"

"Yes, and danced with me. But he did not carry on any very interesting conversation, so that I fear he is in this respect much the same as any other gentleman."

If our poor engineer could have heard this judgment! It was just as well he did not, as in that case he certainly would have turned his back upon the little town, and there would have been an end to our history. Luckily, however, at the very moment that Marie Louise was saying this last sentence to her mother, Williamson was saying to himself,—"She certainly will have remarked immediately that I am quite of a different stamp to the other blockheads who are paying court to her."

God be thanked that we have all of us this self-love! Now and then it may do much harm, but at other times it does much good.

"*You mean that he is* rather awkward—perhaps, as if he was unaccustomed to the language of good society?" asked her mother.

"No, I did not mean awkward! But he seemed to be what a man often becomes when he has not much intercourse with well-educated women; that is, shy, and at the same time rather forward."

Better and better.

"At all events," continued Williamson, as he stretched himself over the edge of the bed, and looked towards the silhouette in the opposite bow, as he continued his conversation with himself, "at all events, she must have seen that I have lived in good society."

"Did he mention anything about the copying?" asked the mother.

"No, so shy was he. I gave him, however, a passing hint about it, and he may understand from what I said, that he can speak to me on the subject when he wishes."

"You were quite right! Copying, which is paid for by the line, is very profitable. Perhaps he is coming over himself about it, as he has not sent the young lad again."

"He mentioned something of the kind as we parted at the door—but you know, mamma, how shabby everything looks here."

"We might have things better if you liked, my dear Marie Louise, *that* every body in the town knows, and perhaps he too. But even as it is, we ought not to be unpolite to people—perhaps you offended him? I know that you are not particular enough now and then."

"No, dear mamma, he could not feel offended. I do not exactly remember what I said, but I know at any rate that I told him we were always at home in the forenoon."

There was a pause in their talk for some time. Marie Louise's busy fingers moved as quickly with the embroidery needle, as if it had been the plain sewing of a piece of linen which was in her hands.

"You have never told me," began her mother again, and stretched her head from out the bed curtains—"you have never told me whether Malcolm was at Segerstad when you were there this time?"

"If I did not tell you," replied Marie Louise, smiling significantly, "you may conclude, mamma, that it was because I do not know a more tiresome person in the whole world than your beloved nephew, the representative of all the cattle markets; and, therefore, I dislike even to speak of him."

"But was he there, I ask?"

"Yes, and he paid me his homage with his accustomed fascinating amiability."

"Take care, Marie Louise! I have already told you that you have more pride and self-love than is quite becoming; and which will, I fear, lead you into unhappiness. The day may come when you may wish for this homage to be yours again—such a gentleman's residence as Malcolm's-Ness is!"

"And such a gentlemen for its owner, as cousin Malcolm, dear mamma!"

"The one may be set against the other. But still—"

"But still," said Marie Louise, ending her mother's sentence, which was purposely left unfinished, "I can be happy and independent without fulfilling mamma's wishes in this respect."

"Oh, as to that, dear child, you know very well—"

"My good dear mamma," said Marie Louise, beseechingly, "it is hard for me to have to remember that in this matter I have not attended to your wishes; it would be also hard for me to be obliged to marry against my inclination, in order that I might be called the mistress of Malcolm's-Ness, and at the same time be ashamed of a husband who cannot speak ten connected sentences in a month."

"He speaks, however, only of discreet things."

"Yes, of his eternal farming, but nothing else does he understand a word about! And I, dearest mamma—pardon me once for all—I will never on these conditions marry and become rich. I am able to support myself."

"And die of hunger if work should fail, and if not, become at last an old maid with spectacles on your nose, knitting stockings and spinning yarn."

"Well and good, my little mamma!" answered Marie Louise, with a merry laugh at the half joking words of her mother. "What we choose ourselves always tastes good—but the light is sinking down in the socket—we will now go to bed, and think no more of Malcolm's-Ness."

* * * * *

The noon-day sun fell brightly on the two myrtle trees, which Marie Louise had so often plundered to make bride garlands for the young girls of the town. It was two days after the evening that we have above described and Marie Louise sat again at the table before *the only window of* the room, busy over the *work which she had* promised to send home. Some one knocked at the door.

"Come in!" cried her mother, and threw her Sunday shawl quickly over her shoulders, Marie Louise's usual very tasteful and simple toilette required no improvement; but, as the footsteps of a man fell on her ear, she smoothed with her hands the braids of her hair.

"Have I the honor of seeing Mrs. N——?" said the Engineer Williamson, who appeared as if to-day he would deserve neither the accusation of shyness nor forwardness.

"Yes; we have already made acquaintance through the window," said she, very courteously; "and my daughter" (the engineer bowed to the young lady) "is also personally acquainted with you."

Marie Louise returned the salutation, and offered a seat.

"Nevertheless," said Williamson, in a tone and manner so refined that it pleased Marie Louise particularly, "I do not make use of this acquaintanceship as an excuse for my visit. Only in the quality of a petitioner have I ventured to intrude."

A friendly look from the young lady encouraged Williamson's eloquence more than the straightforward question of her mother, "About what?—probably about the copying?"

"No," said he, hastily, although he with difficulty could conquer his repugnance to speaking on the subject. "I would not trouble the young lady with it. It is much too tiresome to go through such rubbish. But perhaps she will not think me quite so bold, if I were to venture to request that she will color some of my maps and plans for me."

"That I should never dare to undertake, Mr. Engineer," replied Marie Louise; "for I know that it requires extraordinary exactitude for such work."

"I should not have ventured to come with my request," continued Williamson, "if I had not heard of your talent for drawing, and therefore felt sure that you would find it quite easy to do my maps."

"Perhaps I could see one?" asked Marie Louise, who appeared to hesitate between the wish to undertake the work, and the fear of not being able to perform it.

"If you will allow me, I will run over and fetch one that I have just begun."

"If it is agreeable to you—if you are sure that you are not giving yourself useless trouble."

"Oh, I do not fear that!"

Williamson was off like a flash of lightning.

The mother looked at her daughter with surprise. "Where did you put your eyes, dear Marie Louise? Do you call him shy or forward to-day? He is as well-bred and well-mannered a young man as one could wish."

"Yes, truly, that he is—and when I think of it now, he appeared to more advantage, on Thursday, when he was speaking to the lady of the house."

"Here he comes back again already. Let us clear all the needle-work away from the table. God grant that you may be able to undertake the maps, my child, for it would be an excellent source of profit."

"That depends upon how much time the work requires, however well he might pay for it. I must beg you, though, mamma, beforehand, not to let me have to receive the money, but to manage it when I am not by."

"Do not fear; I see that he is far too delicate to mention such a thing before you. Such a——. But, hush! here he comes."

Marie Louise laid aside her work, drew the curtain aside, and assisted the young surveyor to spread out the maps, over which they both bent—he describing and she listening.

It was a pleasant feeling to Williamson, and one that rewarded him for much past labor, to have now, at the side of a young and beautiful woman, to retrace his way in these maps over roads that he had lately traversed with such trouble and difficulty. He lingered as long as he could find a pretext for at every point, until inwardly lamenting the quick flight of the minutes, he let the map roll up together again, whilst his looks sought those of the young girl.

Marie Louise leant her elbow against the window-frame, reflecting, and as Williamson contemplated her, he felt that his former "but" had vanished. She might do or say what she would, he had never seen so charming, and, at the same time, so dignified and unassuming a woman.

"Well, then, Mr. Engineer, if I should attempt this and not succeed, could the mischief be remedied?"

"Very easily; I can then copy the map again."

"In that case," added Marie Louise, as she made a slight grimace, "Mr. Engineer would not be a great gainer. If, however, you will allow me, I will try to copy the whole map. Should I then not be successful, you will lose nothing by it."

"But you, young lady, would lose your time."

"I fear that, under any circumstances; but one learns nothing without sacrificing something.—I am quite determined to try."

"I cannot sufficiently thank you, under any circumstances. But I should be in the highest degree obliged, if you would allow me to give you a little advice at the beginning, which might be of great service to you."

"Very willingly, if the engineer will be so good. For a few days I shall be busy with some work which I have already in hand, but next week we could begin our undertaking."

Who now was more enraptured than Williamson! Meanwhile that he might not appear intrusive, now that the business was ended, he took his hat and withdrew, leaving behind a very agreeable impression on both mother and daughter.

CHAPTER VI.

LETTER OF ENGINEER WILLIAMSON TO A FRIEND AT HOME.

Only listen, thou old Goth, who lingerest on the musty threshold of our forefathers, rather than breathe a breath of strange air; hast thou ever considered what an absurdity thou desirest, in wishing that I, for the edification of the family at home, should spend my valuable time not merely in writing letters, but, good heavens! whole epistles, detailing the life of a poor surveyor? If, however, I were literally to relate how on this or that day I passed over a new boundary line, measured this or that road, or allotted this or that piece of ground to Peter, Olle, Andrew, or John, all this, I should be told, was far too tedious to be set down on paper, and that something interesting was wanted, something, as people say now-a-days, "in the form of a sketch."

But these favorite "sketches" are not to be found hanging on the twigs that I have to break my way through in many of the paths I traverse, and I could wish that I were able to describe how wearisome and unpleasant, in every respect except the earning of money, are these journeys and this business; how miserably one lives in these peasants' huts among the mountains; how often one is wet to the skin, with muddy boots that one can scarce drag after one, and ragged as a gipsy, ere one can reach the desired haven, which is often only a smoky room, with a panof fried bacon, without even a glass of grog to warm one and give a relish to the food.

Yet in spite of all this, so long as good temper, health, and cash are to be secured, the surveyor can bear his fatigues. Something he must do, and a free life in wood and plain agrees better with my disposition than to sit chained like thee to a writing-desk. Therefore will I send you all something of a "sketch" that shall raise a smile, if possible on your long faces.

Something more than a month ago—it was my last job before I came into the town—I had to finish the measuring of an island which lay about three miles from my station, and set off for the purpose one foggy morning with one of my assistants, Carl, and a rower.

"Among the principles which I cherish most, and from which I have never yet departed, is that of never setting out on a voyage in autumn without taking with me at least three corked and sealed "bottle" companions. This precaution I observed also on this occasion, and sat quietly in my boat, and thought, "Come what will, storm, contrary winds, or calm, I have still my grog and my pipe in reserve, with which I can revive my spirits."

But what does man know of the result of his foolish reckonings! I beg of you all to trim your lamp, and lend an attentive ear.

"A boat to the sea-ward, which is coming straight towards us!" said my brave old steersman, and pointed in the direction where another son of the sea was ploughing his way in our direction.

"Halt!" said I. "It is probably some one who wishes to speak with me," and shortly afterwards I perceived, though I fain would have mistrusted my eyes, an old acquaintance, one of those cronies that we stumble upon without very well knowing their names, and with whom we have made acquaintance one knows not how, at some moment when, with a glass in our hand, we have not been very particular as to whom we gave the pledge of brotherhood.

Such a "brother" stood now in the rocking boat before me, a fellow not altogether unknown to me by reputation—namely, a certain celebrated brandy-loving advocate, Pellander, who, during the last quarter of a century, has immortalized his name partly through the number of lawsuits that he has unravelled, and partly through his extraordinary dexterity in consuming all description of liquids.

"Mr. 'Gineer Will'son!" called out my lively *friend, who indulged* his propensity during three-*fourths of his time*, and during this happy period abridged by one-half the titles and names of his acquaintances—"'Gineer Will'son—brother, I ought to say—ah! brother of my heart, how are you?"

"Uncommonly bad, my good Mr. Pellander. We have regular dog-weather."

"Sad, very sad! But as it is always better when one suffers in company, so—if you have no objection, brother Will'son—so, let us get the boats better alongside! I also want to go to Binham Island, to Andrew Anderson. You have been paid, I think, already?" These last words Pellander addressed to his boatman, and before the latter could bring out a long and astonished "No," the advocate had sprung into my boat.

With difficulty I succeeded in concealing from his searching glance my provision of bottles. I have already told you that I had three amiable "friends" in my company; but as friends of the same mind become at last very tiresome to each other, fate had sent me, as a change, a little diversity of opinion in the form of the advocate Pellander.

"I ought, according to the agreement, to receive nine marks," said the man in the empty boat.

"Good, my friend; I will deduct them from the next account I have against you."

What was to be done? With or without my will must I submit to the spell of Pellander's domination. The fact was that he had got a trace of my flight; and as he thought that he could thus get his own passage free, he had only taken a boat in order to fall in with me at a convenient spot.

"Have you nothing to warm one, brother?" asked Pellander, who I could observe, had already consumed the provision that he had himself brought.

"Only a little, as good as nothing; and this little is irrevocably destined to enliven my evening, after being out all day. Do you understand me, Mr. Pellander?"

"If my brother is too niggardly to offer me a glass of grog, he need not be so haughty as if he did not remember that we have taken the pledge of brotherhood, and that on an occasion—brother Will'son will remember it well—when far grander fellows than himself begged this favor of me."

"I remember it very well," replied I, respectfully; "and it arises only out of a proper feeling, if I, as so young a man, hesitate to apply the name of 'brother' to one so far above me in both years and merit."

"Oh! your obedient servant, your obedient servant! that matters little—my brother can then call me 'uncle.'"*

I declared that I was greatly honoured by this new favor, but resolved to make as little use of it as possible.

When we reached Andrew Anderson's, we found, it is true, a little preparation for us, after peasant fashion; but during the next day's business the store of provisions was so nearly exhausted, that Pellander fetched deep sighs over the empty dishes and pitchers, and was greatly delighted when the day of departure came; but suddenly in the middle of the previous night, so tremendous a storm, or rather hurricane arose, that a passage of three leagues back in an open boat would have been the same as intentionally bidding adieu to life. As I have told you that previous to the breaking out of the storm it was high time to think of returning home, you may imagine our condition when the storm, instead of abating the third and fourth days, increased to such a pitch that, what with impatience and want, we were quite in despair. Cold and rain, fog and howling wind in every corner! It was such a storm, that one lost both sight and hearing if one ventured to put one's nose out of doors.

As a last resource, to warm and enliven us in the cold and damp room, which I and my people, with Pellander and a son of the peasant had in common made our sitting-room, I had with admirable prudence and management, and not without a thousand difficulties, succeeded in preserving my last flask of rum; for even were we not to be frozen to death, nor destined to live through another Robinson Crusoe's life, we could easily perceive, by the state of the sea, that it would not be passable until the next week. Economy, too, was all the more necessary a virtue, since, added to our other disasters, we had a very scanty supply of fire-wood. "Uncle" Pellander, poor soul, had become so thin that his coat could wrap nearly half way round his body again. His face had lost its radiant glance, and bore the stamp of the deep sorrow which he felt at passing his time in so strict a fast.

Reason, Patience, and Time! these three excellent rules of life, which formed the ground-work of my lexicon, were long my consolation. But everything has its limits, even Time—at least, to us mortals; wherefore, it follows very clearly that Patience was at last at an end. I recited Valerias—thou knowest that he has sung this god-like gift, Patience, but it afforded me little comfort; and I call upon the whole tribe of poets to confess whether they would have preserved an ounce of it, had they been partakers in the misfortunes which crowned all our disasters.

Our ancestors were great men—who could almost do without anything! Afterwards, without one knowing where the seed was sown, sprang up the tree of knowledge and desire, under whose boughs we, their puny descendants, seek shelter. Wants increase like locusts, and we are not ashamed to confess our degeneracy. Holberg said often in his "Peter Paas"—"without beer and bread the hero is nothing." He forgot to add "in a storm," by which we may judge that Holberg wrote this heroic poem in summer time; and we ask, if the hero is nothing without food and drink, what must the ordinary man, in such circumstances be? Alas!—even less than nothing. It is remarkable, however, that the nearer I approach my catastrophe, the higher rises my desire to find distinguished examples in real life. I stick to history, and look upon the heaven-directed Napoleon and his expedition to Russia. Not even he—that is, he represented in his army, could stand out against cold, hunger, and thirst; he fell, deprived of all but honor. Could he, however, contemplate, in philosophical repose at Elba, his loss of power and the fall of his greatest works? No! yet once again rose up the eagle into the cloud of heaven, until Jupiter, whose image he wished to represent on earth, checked with his lightning his flight, and cast him down, stunned for ever, on St. Helena's rock. Here, perhaps, he shed tears to the fall of the herculean edifice which he had seen rise and fall, tears, (for all things, from the greatest to the least, acquire their true value in time of need) such as *we* shed when Carl, the rascal, let fall to the ground our last flask of rum!

Perhaps you will consider this a very simple and unassuming introduction to an affair of so much importance? But when the storm of passion is over, one can speak calmly of the past. I remember still the tears that Pellander mingled with the stream which flowed over the floor of our room, and as he sucked in the fumes of the spirit and perhaps something, besides, he exclaimed: "Alas, alas, brother! How couldst thou have the heart to conceal from me this treasure? See now the results of thy selfish calculations!—hadst thou only given the bottle into my charge, it would have come, at all events, to a more worthy end. And thou, lubber!"—and here Pellander raised his voice, and his clenched fist danced over Carl's nose—"thou lubber, standing there with the broken bottle in thy hand, gaping at me—oh, were I but thy master!"

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* The name of "uncle," or "aunt," is often applied as a term of *endearment by young people to friends much older than themselves.*

It was only by a quick spring on one side that Carl saved himself.

But our want and our misery were only increased, and after the third day's diet on herrings, oat-cake, and fresh water, we were deprived of what little remains of strength and courage were left to us.

At last a day dawned, when the rage of the elements was appeased. We were almost obliged to carry Pellander to the boat—so great an inroad had this week's fasting made on his physical man. As we set foot on land again, however, he made a solemn vow to restore the damage as speedily as possible, and on the following day I found he had honorably fulfilled his vow; since I met him quite reconciled again to his fate, and after his usual manner, he thanked "brother Will'son" for his good company. And here ends the "sketch" of uncle Pellander and the last flask of rum.

My friends at home have perhaps expected something quite different; for instance, a description of my life in the town, my courting and its success, &c.—but every one is familiar with "sketches" of this kind, that is to say, of all that goes on in a little town in which a civilized young man has settled down; I will not say like a hawk among the doves, since this comparison would on one side be quite unjust, for I am far too timid to play the hawk; but as for the doves, they have here the greatest possible resemblance to tame ones. There is, in fact, but one solitary wild wood-pigeon here, who lives amongst the rest free and proud. Yet I must set aside the comparison of the latter to a dove. in order to introduce her to you as my neighbor in a bow-windowed room opposite my own—since you must know that I also dwell in an apartment of this description. I will not describe the beautiful Marie Louise, for all descriptions of beauty are so worn out, that one must give *them up*. Suffice it to say, that she is a crea*ture whose* appearance, both from the win*dow and* when seen near, awakens most indescribable feelings. I have succeeded in gaining admission into her home. She has even begun to work at copying a map of mine—for she is poor, and I, happy man, have obtained permission to give her instructions, speak to her, and sit by her.

You may perceive, however, that I am not in love with her, or I could not write about her. I am glad to be able to say of her, that she is as much of an angel as a mortal woman can be: amiable, good, industrious, and yet not one of the class of lilies with drooping heads which require supporting, for she is able to support herself.

At this moment her beautiful arm is extended from behind the curtains—my heart and head are too warm for me to write any more. I have seen this arm near, and know that it has no equal.

And now you know all that you want to know. My business is going on well, except that I now and then waste too much time. But I must improve! After Christmas the days are longer, and it is easier to work.

Farewell, farewell! my dear friends at home—alas! my beloved mother—no longer can your lips relax into a smile, as you listen to a letter from me! Yet my friends and relations, you wish to hear tidings of me, and God bless you for it. My heart is so capacious, that I believe I could take in the whole world. Yours ever,

WILLIAM.

Alas, alas! what voice from the abodes of darkness is that which I hear quarrelling with Carl out there! "I tell you, you rascal, 'Gineer Will'son is at home, I saw him at the window!" Heavens! Pellander! he comes always like an evil spirit, and now, of all times, must he make his appearance? My worthy neighbors to see that I have such an acquaintance! Here he is! and at this minute she is drawing back the curtains—I wish—the deuce take the fellow! What unlucky chance has brought him to this town!

CHAPTER VII.

How blest am I—see, in thousand forms
Dances each beautiful ideal round me.
RUNEBERG.

"YOUR servant, brother Will'son—thanks, thanks, for our late merry life in Binham

Island." With these words, the advocate Pellander, who wore his usual leather pouch across his breast, took his seat, without waiting for an invitation, and Williamson was somewhat relieved to see that by chance he had chosen the chair which stood farthest from the window.

Pellander's face to-day bore more than usually signs of the ill effects of intemperance. He looked like a man who was ready to sacrifice even coat and waistcoat to the gratification of his propensity, and Pellander's propensity was at all times powerful.

"What procures our town the honor of so gracious a visit?" asked the engineer.

"A little business, brother Will'son," answered the advocate, as he winked his eyes, "a little profitable business for a wealthy client, whose acquaintance I have lately made. Only just think, a man in this town here has summoned the mighty lord and potentate—that is, the land proprietor, squire Malcolm M——, of Malcolm's-Ness, before the court-sessions of this place, about some cheating affair. Aforesaid high magnate, according to the assertion of the complainant, has sold a pair of horses as faultless, and these are now found so full of vices that ——"

"Oh, I understand," interrupted the engineer, "the affair is complicated! The great man has therefore chosen an ambassador that will make him the envy of the whole world, a jurist who has few equals; in short, I congratulate the lord magnate potentate, land proprietor, on the happy results of his lawsuit—for that is already certain, since 'uncle' Pellander is to conduct it."

"Oh, brother Will'son, not so much flattery! It is true that I am now and then fortunate, or rather, it has seldom happened that I have lost a suit. Your business, brother Will'son, is to lay open new estates, and mine—excuse the comparison—is to lay open new lawsuits, when they have been left in the dark abyss of oblivion and forgetfulness."

"Yes, so it is," said Williamson, who was led on, against his will, to amuse himself with this administrator of the law; "so it is; but it is not given to every one to be a genius."

"Deeply and truly thought and spoken! That is a fine phrase—it is not given to every one to be a genius! But brother Will'son may console himself that he has succeeded in *deceiving a man whom no* one else has ever deceived; I mean lately, when we took that little journey together, and when brother Will'son—I say it openly, that it showed talent—contrived to smuggle a good friend through my watchful toll-house, who, through Carl, suffered shipwreck afterwards."

"Yes, indeed, I was punished for it afterwards! My intentions were good, however, for I meant it for the enlivening of the following days. But excuse me, good 'uncle,' if, to my grief, I must be sincere enough to observe, that just at present I am so overwhelmed with business, that——"

"It matters not; brother Will'son need not put himself out of the way; I can amuse myself very well alone. But see what a pretty young lady there is at the window opposite! I should like to see her a little nearer."

"Impossible! that will never do!" and as Pellander was in the act of establishing his rosy countenance at the window-pane, Williamson suddenly drew down the curtains. Perhaps this movement, inconsiderately made, was not very prudent, since it is certain that the quick manœuvre, as well as Pellander's face, was remarked by the neighbor opposite.

The advocate's stay in the town lasted only over another day: and as Williamson heard him for the last time say, "Farewell, brother of my heart, 'Gineer Will'son!" he felt an inexpressible lightening of his heart. He hoped that now all further acquaintanceship with this person was cut off for ever, and he rejoiced at it all the more, since, being accustomed in general to be very particular in the choice of his companions, he was fearful that those who did not know him well might judge ill of the intimacy into which he had fallen with a person of so ambiguous a character as Pellander.

Williamson's fears were afterwards fulfilled; but now he soon forgot both the visit and the visitor, for his mind was filled with a very different impression, and in proportion as this gradually acquired a definite coloring, so did he remain at home busied with his work, and accepted only those invitations where he hoped to meet the inhabitant of the bow-windowed room. Should he discover, however, through a very artful system of espionage, that she would not be of the party, he became so busy that ten messages would not shake him from his purpose, nor induce him to leave his place at the writing-table, to which he was held chained by an agreeable sort of magnetic influence.

It would, meanwhile, be infringing on truth were we to insinuate that he sat there inactive and dreaming, looking at mere passing shadows. Now and then he did this, but the greater part of his time he felt his former capability for hard work returned to him. It was so pleasant to be able to sit at work so near to her who had also to work for her bread. The new year had not yet portioned out to him its unequal inheritance of sad and happy days, ere he began to think that it could bring no sorrow equal to the joy of having to work for both. Perhaps from the very first he had nourished the germs of the feeling which gave rise to this thought. Certain it is, that it needed two full months for these to take root and put forth blossoms, assisted principally by the instructions given in map-drawing. Marie Louise became soon so skilful, that she could do without assistance; but as Williamson had got accustomed to running over the way to show her how this or that was to be done, he could not leave off the good habit, but took the liberty of—either behind her chair or seated by her side—watching the progress of her beautiful hand.

An open homage, however, such as would justify the little town in considering him engaged, had not yet taken place; since, as far as they knew—and in this town every one knew everything—he had never been at his opposite neighbors' in his black dress-coat, nor still less in his uniform; from beginning to end he had only worn his brown frock-coat! And the conclusion derived from such ingenious observations was, that Williamson's visits were caused entirely by the maps, and not by her who was drawing them.

As Christmas approached, our engineer would have gladly manifested his gratitude in other ways than merely through the small sum of money which the mother of Marie Louise had received for her. He did not venture, however, in the fear of offending her whom he was so anxious to please. During the days just before and after Christmas, too, he did not dare visit her so often, as an accumulation of needlework claimed all her time. She had herself mentioned this, and he was obliged to satisfy himself with his observations through window and curtains.

"Now, my good Mr. Engineer," said the old counsellor's wife, who saw through these matters sharper than the others, "do you know that we are thinking of having a little entertainment on New-Year's eve. Would the engineer be so good as to let us make use of his parlor, which joins ours by folding-doors?"

"Most willingly, my dear Mistress Utter. But what pleasant guests should I then see in my room?"

"Oh, guests enough! a whole heap of them! so that you can dance and make merry as you will. I like having young people at my house, and Miss Marie Louise is the sweetest flower in the whole garland."

"In that, I am of your opinion," and Williamson's heart beat high with joy. Marie Louise would walk about his room, sit on his chairs, see his papers, his books, and his writing-table. How dear would all these things now become to him! He was quite foolish with joy.

In a little party which took place between Christmas and the new year, he met the object of his thoughts, and complained to her that it was so long since he had seen her.

"If Mr. Engineer had wished to visit us, the way was short enough," answered Marie Louise, with the most friendly look that he had yet received.

"But you were more than usually busy, and I thought I understood a little hint which consigned me to banishment for an indefinite time."

"No, indeed, it was not so intended," added Marie Louise, blushing.

"Then I may understand——"

"That as no decree of banishment was issued——" and a significant smile finished her sentence.

Williamson bowed, and his radiant looks showed how much meaning he ventured to attach to these words. Marie Louise, however, possessed a great talent for cooling the warmth of his feelings when it rose too high.

"I shall be leaving home after Twelfth-day," said she, in a tone of indifference.

"You are going away?"

"Yes, for a little time, in the country—I was obliged to promise it."

Williamson's joy was annihilated.

"And you stay away, perhaps, until the spring?" Williamson trembled to think that this was the time when his own business would take him away.

"Not so long, I believe,—it is, however, quite undecided."

A gentleman came to ask Marie Louise to dance, and Williamson, who had forgotten to secure her hand as a partner in the course of their conversation, saw her stand up with another. At this moment he was not disposed to ask another to waltz with him, and the agreeable engineer, on whom all the mothers were reckoning for their daughters at this the first regular dance which had taken place since he came into the town, went and sat down at the card-table with counsellor Utter and two other gentlemen."

"What in Heaven's name is the matter with our engineer?" said Mistress Utter to Marie Louise, who a short time after sought a place by the side of her friendly old neighbor.

"Is something the matter with him?"

"Yes, indeed; for he who is so fond of dancing, has gone and sat down at the card-table. Has he not asked you to dance?"

"No, most certainly not."

"Dear! so, then, you were speaking to him just now of something else. He is a good, uncommonly good man, that engineer of ours! A man, my good young lady, who has not his like in the whole town—regular in his work and in all his doings and habits—straightforward and industrious—a right estimable young man. But do I see right?—yes truly, here he comes! Mr. Engineer! Mr. Engineer! just come here! As I have a certain degree of right to keep guardianship over you, you must let me know, my dear sir, why you have gone over to the card-table?"

"Because," said Williamson, with a quick glance at Marie Louise,—"because I was too much lost in thought to be able to act. I intended to have asked a lady to dance, and some one got before me."

"And was your pleasure in dancing consequently at an end?" remarked Mistress Utter, whilst Marie Louise busied herself in fastening a bow on her dress, which had not the least intention of getting loose.

"Not quite at an end, but as I must entertain myself with something, I thought I would try my luck in another direction. That has not been any more favorable, so I have left it."

"So!—and you have been losing?"

"I have paid my fee as apprentice, and discovered that I shall never become a master in the art."

"Is that not praiseworthy, Miss Marie Louise," said the old lady, turning to her, "to leave *the game when one is* unlucky? I know many who would have been stirred up to take their revenge, instead of being satisfied to retire prudently with a lightened purse."

"In order to go on playing when one was a loser," said Marie Louise, "the passion for play must be very strong."

"I do not think that is necessary," replied Williamson. "Since without having the slightest inclination to gaming, the vexation one feels at losing may create the desire to repair the loss again, and in the case of long continued ill-luck, this may almost amount to a passion—so that in this matter I agree with Mistress Utter."

"Mr. Engineer then prides himself on his victory over himself," said Marie Louise smiling.

"And why not? It was not effected without difficulty. But now it is gained I shall in future make it a point not to sit down to a card-table again, unless I am forced by others, or from inclination."

"What else could lead you to play?" asked the old lady, laughing

"Why, without being forced by others, or from any inclination, one may sit down to play for the sake of getting rid of some disagreeable fancies from which one cannot otherwise extricate oneself."

"Excuse me, my friends, the burgomaster's wife is beckoning to me." And the old lady set off into the next room.

Williamson took the empty seat.

Marie Louise did not avoid his looks. Both blushed. She understood what Williamson had meant, and seemed glad that he had said it so openly.

"Are you engaged also for the next waltz?"

"Yes, and for more than will be danced probably."

"And you have none for me?"

"I could not be unpolite to the gentleman who came before you, Mr. Engineer."

"That is true—and there remains nothing for me but to try my luck again at the card-table."

"Then you really will not dance with any of the other ladies?"—over Williamson's brow flashed a deep red—"or," added Marie Louise, after enjoying his vexation for a few seconds, "perhaps a quadrille will content you instead of a waltz, as I have one disengaged?"

Before Williamson could answer, one of the most distinguished partners of the evening, came up and asked her for this very quadrille.

"Thank you, I am already engaged," answered Marie Louise quickly.

"To me?" whispered Williamson, when they were left undisturbed. "Ah, Marie Louise, how can I thank you enough!"

"I do not know that there is anything to thank me for. Such a dance-loving person as I am does not willingly sit still; I was afraid no one might ask me."

"Must you always make a point," said Williamson, with warmth, "of having half a dozen freezing words at hand, to cool down the joy of a few friendly ones?"

The music began to play, and Marie Louise drew on her gloves.

"You are still an answer in my debt, young lady," continued Williamson, as he arose and offered his arm. But during the promenade to their places, she said, in a friendly tone: "I shall no longer keep any accounts. All that has passed before the quadrille must be considered as balanced and settled."

"But," objected Williamson, "it is not yet begun, so that you have plenty of time to answer the question."

"Never expect, however, that a young lady should remember a question whilst they are waiting for the beginning of a quadrille, for that would show that you know nothing about them."

Her manner and look were so bewitching as she spoke these words, that Williamson on his side was left an answer in her debt. Uninterruptedly he followed her slightest movements as she lightly and gracefully swam through the dance, and each time that she returned to her place, some playful joke played on her beautiful lips.

Our engineer gave up all hopes of being able this time to get in a serious word. "But I must wait," thought he; "the party on New-Year's eve will be more favorable."

CHAPTER VIII.

He looked back: already much of heaven lay behind; but still more had he before him.—SCHWAB.

"BLESS my soul! is that the way to carry a tray. What are you thinking about?" cried the counsellor's wife, as she met Carl in the *midst of* a run up stairs full speed. "Do you *not see, blockhead,* that all the candlesticks *are leaning* on one side? If I had not come in time they would all have been down to the ground."

"Heaven forbid!" said Carl. "I should have taken good care of them."

"Yes, yes, all very well—but listen now: have you been told how they are to be placed? Let me hear."

"Well, four on the bureau, and two on each table excepting the corner table, where they must be placed among the fiddlers, and then candles in all the sconces."

"Yes, those you must fetch from below."

"Those I fetched yesterday?"

"What do you mean? The lamps you got together, but the candles I have scarcely any of."

"But I bought them yesterday—and, moreover, wax lights."

"Wax lights!—Who sent you, then?" asked Mistress Utter, somewhat angrily.

"Mr. Engineer."

"So, so; he thought my candles would not do!" And long before Carl, had the old lady herself mounted the stairs to the upper floor, where Williamson was busy here and there, arranging everything most carefully.

"My little Engineer, what does all this mean? You have been buying wax lights for all the sconces—that I certainly should not have done, for not even the burgomaster had wax lights, even last year, when his eldest daughter was married; and I must confess, Mr. Engineer, that I certainly should not like to have it said that the Utters had become proud in their old days."

"My good dear Mistress Utter!—yet stop; let me this last day of the year, lay aside all formality; and since you and the good counsellor treat me more like a son than a lodger, let me, in future, make use of the familiar names of 'Uncle' and 'Aunt,' when I address you."

"Thanks, thanks, that is a good thought," said the old lady, curtseying and simpering; "and now and then I shall be saying, 'My Little Engineer,'" and here she received a most affectionate embrace, which she returned in right motherly fashion. "But now," continued she, "you must account for the wax-lights—no shuffling of the cards, if you please."

"Far from it! I was intending to explain, when another idea came into my head. It is really only out of politeness towards the ladies, who would have to sit on the benches, so as to protect their dresses from tallow-grease; and I wanted to arrange this little surprise without Aunt Gretchen knowing anything about it, since, as my room is to be used for the festival, I must give my share towards the lighting of it."

"Well, then, keep your dear wax-lights," answered the old lady, now conquered. "I know very well for whom the tallow candles were not good enough, although the poor thing would be glad always to have plenty, even of them."

Williamson became read as the tulip whose stem he was trying to support; he pretended, however, not to understand the allusion of his old friend.

"I am rather uneasy about her," continued she, as she dusted with her apron the already dusted looking-glass.

"About whom?" asked Williamson, without turning his head.

"Why, about our neighbors over the way there; for, you see, two or three days before Christmas, they actually had no store of firewood in the house to warm themselves with."

"Who said so?" asked the engineer, quite unable to suppress his emotion.

"Well, those have said it who know it: that is, their landlady."

"She must surely have told an untruth."

"No, indeed; she is a most respectable person; and I should never repeat any gossiping. It is, besides, all the more certain, because I myself lent them some wood, or rather—but this is all between ourselves—I lent their landlady, Mistress Leander, some, that she might lend it to them again. However, two days ago, they got two cart-loads from Segerstad, and I had my wood back again directly; they are always so particular."

"Good God!" sighed Williamson, who now understood the cause of his own banishment during the previous week.

"Yes, God is good!" continued the old lady. "Miss Marie Louise will be an excellent wife for some good man."

Williamson could not refrain from seizing the hand of the old woman. There was so much real goodness, so much sincere and warm sympathy in her words, that he could not pretend not to understand her. He looked at her kindly, and, without a word being spoken, he felt he had a confidante. With a smile on her lips, the old counsellor's wife tripped down to her saucepans again.

Almost as uneasily as a bridegroom on his wedding day, did Williamson await the beginning of the evening's proceedings. His own room seemed as if it would never be arranged rightly. Now he put everything that was not wanted away, that it might look as if he were orderly, and the next minute papers and books were brought out again, that the place might not look stiff and formal; in short, he altered it so often, that the inner room was downright untidy when the first of the guests began to arrive. Before Marie Louise appeared, however, his mind had recovered its equipoise, so that he was able to remedy all defects.

At this yearly festival at the Utter's there was always much meriment and freedom from constraint. This evening, however, it was more brilliant than usual; and everything, from the wax-lights and punch-bowls with the golden lemon-slices floating about to the well fattened capons and sugar tarts, betokened simplicity and plenty in their arrangements and preparations.

Although the mother of Marie Louise was invited to all the entertainments in the town, yet she never went out, either, as they said, from pride, or from want of a suitable wardrobe. Others, judging more kindly, presumed that long-continued sorrow and straitened circumstances had disposed her mind for solitude.

However this may be, Marie Louise came as usual, this evening, alone; and perhaps it was this custom of going out unaccompanied which gave to her deportment and manners a certain security and freedom which many ascribed to a feeling of superiority, and which went beyond the constraint to which the other young girls of the town were accustomed.

Marie Louise wore to-day a dress, that not merely called forth the envy, but almost produced a commotion in the circle of ladies. The whole town knew that "the ladies of the bow-windowed room," as they were sometimes designated, the whole week previous to Christmas had not had a single log of firewood that was not borrowed—and now she was wearing a dress of violet silk!

"No—consistency in all things," said the clergyman's wife, a little newly married lady, who could not bear that her black levantine bridal dress should be eclipsed by another, especially as it had to do duty for many years at innumerable weddings, christenings, and burials.

"Marie Louise received this dress from the

Baroness Segerstad as a Christmas present," remarked one of those rarely found good creatures who feel hurt at any ebullition of envy. "She got it for teaching the little girl to draw so nicely, and because the baroness besides this always treats Marie Louise quite as a sister."

"That may be, Ma'am'selle I——; yet it does not quite become Miss Marie Louise to wear such a dress—that you must confess. I think she was smart enough at the last ball in her gauze dress."

"But since she has had the dress given her, she ought to wear it."

"In my opinion, it would have been better to have sold it to some one whom it would have suited better."

At this moment approached Marie Louise, as beautiful as Hebe herself, and playing with the lace of the richly embroidered scarf which was thrown over her shoulders and fell over the envied dress; she drew near the ladies as her name still hung on their lips. Irresistibly the young married lady made way for her, and the good-natured Ma'am'selle I—— was so kind as to give up to her her own place.

"Dearest Marie Louise, what a sweet perfume is wafted from the flowers in your hair," said the clergyman's wife, with a soft flattering voice. "Where have you got such beautiful roses and such lovely geraniums? We are in the middle of winter."

"Yes—am I not to be envied," answered Marie Louise with a radiant smile. "I have our good hostess Mistress Utter to thank for the attention."

"But the boquet in your girdle," continued the lady, "is even more beautiful! Look, Ma'am'selle I——, that is just such a wallflower as we admired in the engineer's room—it is really very pretty."

"I think so too, let it have grown where it may," added Marie Louise, coldly, and then turned to address some friendly words to another neighbor. Williamson, who had undertaken to assist "Uncle Utter" in doing the honors, came at this moment into the room, as Mistress Utter herself was leading Marie Louise across it, and the impression which she made on him this evening by her whole appearance was such as he could conceal neither under the forms of custom nor the restraints of politeness.

Quite incapable of speaking to her, he *merely bowed* at a distance, an incivility *which quite offended* Marie Louise, especially as the clergyman's wife said, pointedly, "I really believe that Engineer Williamson does not recognize Miss Marie Louise in her elegant dress this evening."

This ill-natured remark sent the blood to Marie Louise's cheeks for a second or two. Williamson saw the effect without suspecting the cause, but as he felt sure that the words spoken had referred to himself, it only increased still more his confusion. He tried to summon up courage to approach her, seeing how laughable it was not to do so, but not succeeding, he entered into conversation with a lady at his side whom he scarcely knew. Suddenly, however, in the midst of his confused talk, which, to tell the truth, not a little surprised the old lady to whom it was addressed, Williamson darted forward—for the old counsellor began at that moment to draw the resin over his bow, a sign that the waltzing was about to begin. Alas! alas! was he then again too late!

Williamson shot through the room to the corner where he knew Marie Louise was sitting. Look at her he could not venture after offending her, perhaps, with his strange greeting. With eyes cast down, all he could say was—"May I beg the honor of the first waltz with you?"

"Thank you; with pleasure!" answered quite a different voice from that of Marie Louise, and as Williamson suddenly looked up, he saw himself face to face with the clergyman's bride. Marie Louise sat at her side, but pretended not to see the engineer, who, in the mean time, quite in despair, saw too late how dangerous it is to ask a lady to dance without looking at her.

But he felt immediately that the mistake could not be remedied, and as it seemed to him now that it would be a rudeness to engage Marie Louise for the next waltz, he was obliged to go away without receiving from her a single look.

The state of mind of our engineer was in no wise improved, as he saw immediately afterwards an unknown guest led by the burgomaster up to Marie Louise, and introduced as a partner for the unlucky waltz. This person, named Lieutenant von Walden, and a relation of the burgomaster's, appeared, in the eyes of a rival, as a most distinguished ball-room "beau." He led out his partner, if not better than the engineer—who was quite a master in the art of dancing—yet in so graceful and polished a manner, that the whole of the sitting public who adorned the sofas and benches were ready to waltz with him through life were it required.

As the dancing couples rested in the middle of the room, Williamson happened to catch, as it fell, a sprig of mignonette, out of the boquet which Marie Louise had fastened into her girdle, and which, although the counsellor had not exactly said so, yet from a hint he had given, she knew to have come from Williamson.

"You have lost something, I think," said he, as he handed to her the fresh and beautiful sprig.

"It does not matter," said Marie, indifferently, and let the poor mignonette fall to the ground, where it was soon trodden on by the foot of Lieutenant von Walden.

It was now the engineer's turn to change color; he felt convinced that she suspected the boquet to be a present from him. She had even worn his flowers, but was now ready to throw them away in contempt. Without knowing it, he had stood nearer to the gate of heaven than he had dared to believe; but that it was now shut against him, he could plainly see, from the manner in which the representative of his love was neglected.

Williamson made an excuse for ending the waltz sooner than his partner quite expected. Out of humor and vexed, he threw himself on a sofa which stood in the bow-windowed room, which was now empty, the elderly ladies and gentlemen having retired to the hostess's own parlor, and taken their places at the card-tables.

After a short time Williamson heard voices in Carl's little apartment, which had this evening been transformed into a dressing-room for the ladies. Was he deceived? Did he not hear the voice of Marie Louise?

The door stood half open.

"Be so good," said she to the maid—for it was really herself—"be so good as to tie my sandal for me. It is not quite broken, but I feel that it ought to be better fastened."

"So, there—it is done," answered the maid, officiously; "and I will also take out a little sprig of fir which has got entangled in the trimming of your dress."

"There are no fir twigs in the room."

"Perhaps on the steps you have caught up one—but I see now, it is a little sprig of mignonette."

"I must have *lost it out of my* girdle!" said Marie Louise, earnestly, "but it shall not have so sad a fate as the other."

She took the sprig, dusted it with her gloves, and fastened it among the flowers in her boquet, where it had formerly been.

Had Williamson seen this little scene?

It was only ten steps from the sofa to the door—and a lover has sharp eyes.

In quite another mood, and led by an impulse of boldness which restored him his usual assurance of manner, he returned to the dancing room, and placed himself in the entrance through which Marie Louise must pass.

"My dear young lady, pardon me if I detain you a moment; but I must honorably confess that in my waltzing engagement just now I was so unfortunate as to make a terrible mistake, which I suffered from so much, that I am ready to confess my awkwardness on the spot. I do not know whether you noticed to whom my words ought to have been addressed, or whether my bow itself, in my confusion, went too far to the left."

"No," answered Marie Louise, as they walked together to the end of the room, where she sat down, "I did not suspect that you had made any mistake."

"Then," said Williamson, significantly, "my conduct must have appeared to you more than merely laughable."

"Neither laughable nor anything else. I did not see anything that even aroused my attention."

"In this case"—Williamson bowed with glowing cheeks—"I must beg of you to excuse my somewhat bold conclusion. I shall probably be punished as I was before, by finding that you are engaged for every waltz. Is it so?"

"Yes, that is the fact."

"And no hope of a quadrille, by way of compensation?"

"It would not be right for me to offer Mr. Engineer a compensation, when he has had no loss. Besides—"

"Besides?"

"I believe I am engaged for the quadrille as well."

"You believe?" repeated Williamson, and turned his eyes with such earnestness on Marie Louise that her cheeks flushed. As he turned away at the same moment, she would willingly have called him back again, but that was not to be done.

Later in the evening, when form and order began to be broken through, and the dancing room besides became intolerably warm, the ladies, led by their hostess, began to extend their promenade into the little inner room, and it was found so agreeable a change that presently every corner was filled with company. The little recess of the bow-window, which with all its leafy plants looked green as a flower-garden, won universal admiration. It was, in fact, very tastefully arranged, but had one fault, and this a very important one. As it was lighted only from the outer room, the dancing ladies did not venture into it, in the fear that the darkness might prevent the gentlemen from seeing and asking them to dance. Marie Louise had seen the inviting place from a distance, but she would not have had courage to enter it, had not one of the young girls beckoned to her to join her, that she might fasten a loosened braid of hair for her.

As our heroine now stood at the window, and looked over the street to her own dwelling, she perceived how plainly a form could be seen and observed behind the curtains. She could see her mother, how she bent and raised her head, and the heart of Marie Louise beat at the natural thought that Williamson had probably stood at the same spot to observe and watch her. Then came a feeling of tenderness over her proud spirit, and she reproached herself for having felt offended at his undesigned manner of greeting her; and afterwards, when he openly and sincerely appealed to her, having treated him with coldness, and, what was worse, with indifference and bitterness.

Leaning against the window, and plunged in the reflections which it had called forth, she did not perceive that her companion had vanished, whilst Williamson had softly approached. He was already close to her when she turned round; and, as if the change was nothing unexpected, she said, without embarrassment, and with so gentle and kind a voice, that Williamson's heart was raised high above all little vexations: "Now I know quite as well as Mr. Engineer, how we appear from here."

"As well as you now know how it appears *here!*" replied Williamson, in a low voice, as he laid his hand upon his heart.

Marie Louise turned her head away, without answering: a slight trembling moved her *lips*.

"*After* supper a cotillion will be danced," continued Williamson; "will Miss Marie Louise also refuse to dance that with me?"

"No, certainly not."

"Thanks—ah, a thousand thanks, dearest Marie Louise! But one more request, now that my lucky star is in the ascendant—it is so often overclouded! We have been proposing this evening a sledging party for the day after to-morrow; the snow will be hard enough, there is a moon, and every thing is favorable. If my highest and dearest wish is not fulfilled, however—that of driving Marie Louise in my sledge—they may arrange what they like, I shall not be of the party."

"Well," answered Marie Louise, in her usual playful manner, "as that would be a loss to the whole company, I must consider it my duty to do nothing that would interfere with their pleasure."

Before she could prevent him, he had taken her hand and pressed it to his lips, and Marie Louise felt the warmth of this kiss even longer than Williamson's brow had previously been clouded.

CHAPTER IX.

> The momentary joy my heart now feels,
> A foretaste of eternal bliss reveals.
>
> Unonius.
>
> . . . . Life plays but for a time
> With a joyous world.
>
> Lenström.

It may be well imagined that the bay horse, as well as Carl, were duly equipped on the important day, so as to do honor to their master at the head of the town sledging party; since, as chief director of the affair, Williamson was to take the lead.

Yet, how did our hero express himself in his "Sketch?" "*What does man know of the result of all his calculations.*"

Poor Williamson! For many years afterwards nothing could vex him more than to be reminded of this sledging party—a true Tycho Brahe's day, from which all his subsequent misfortunes were dated.

On no January morning shone the sun brighter than on this. The cold had left roses in frost-work upon Williamson's window-panes, but he thawed them with his lips, in order that he might look over to his opposite neighbor's. Alas! her windows were also covered with frost-roses, and not a single glance could steal in. At half-past ten, he thought he might with propriety pay a visit, so as to get a ray of sunshine from Marie Louise, before he drove to the inn, where the party was to assemble, and where he had some arrangements to make. With a warm heart and joyful countenance, he entered his neighbor's apartment, and Marie Louise seemed to receive him, if not with warmth, at least friendly and joyful. A half hour was passed, during which serious and playful words were passed from lip to lip. Williamson took his leave. At three o'clock he would be back, and at four o'clock, he was to fetch her.

They parted.

Marie Louise took out her dress, her shawl, and other little articles of dress, smoothed her hair before the glass, loosened her ringlets from their fetters, and then rolled them up again, so as to pack them under her cap, which was tried on again and again.

"You are taking plenty of time in dressing to-day, my child," said her mother, smiling.

Marie Louise looked affectionately into her mother's eyes, kissed her beloved hand, and answered confidingly:

"To-day is one of my good days. I am as happy as a child."

"God grant that it may last," added her mother; "may no caprice disturb your happiness."

"What caprice, dearest little mamma?"

"A caprice of fate, or of your own."

"Oh, I cannot be capricious to-day. One is not capricious when one is happy."

"And why, my Marie Louise, are you more than usually happy to-day?" asked her mother, as she held her daughter's hand tenderly between her own.

"I do not know myself, dearest mamma! But so free, and lighthearted, and joyful, have I never felt before. Yesterday, at the beginning of the new year, I communed with myself very seriously, and thought to myself of what you, mamma, always wish to see improved, my fickleness, and why should I not own it—my proud spirit, which is so often wounded, whilst I am not careful enough not to wound others."

"Ah, Marie Louise, how glad I am to hear you speak thus! Has the beautiful sermon of our good pastor awakened these good purposes in you, my child!"

"No, mamma, I had formed them before," answered Marie Louise, and bowed her head, blushing, over her mother's shoulder. "Still they were strengthened at church, and I trust *forever.*"

Whilst mother and daughter were thus holding converse, Williamson was executing his commission at the inn, which stood some little distance from the town. When perfectly convinced that every thing was done and arranged to secure the pleasure and convenience of the party, he, at two o'clock, seated himself again in his sledge, and was reckoning on his way home how much time was left for his toilette, when, not far from the town, he perceived an open sledge coming towards him. He drew up his horse at the same moment that the driver of the other carriage appeared to have received orders to do the same, and in another second was Williamson out of his sledge, and standing at the door of the other.

"Marie Louise!" exclaimed he, almost breathless from astonishment.

"My good Engineer Williamson," answered Marie Louise, with a tone of confidence that she had never before used, "do not be angry—it is not my fault, really it is not—yet I see that you are ready to condemn me unheard."

"God forbid that I should condemn any one unheard, least of all her by whom I wish to be favorably judged myself; yet, tell me, in Heaven's name, what is this all about?"

"Only an hour ago I received by this sledge a note from the Baroness Segerstad, who ——"

"I cannot, I dare not, venture to say," interrupted Williamson, with beseeching looks, "what an extremely unpleasant impression it gives me, that a messenger, a note, let it come from whom it may, should chase away so quickly the remembrance of a promise previously made. But it is not too late to alter. Turn back again, I beg; so much for me depends on this kindness on your part."

"It cannot be; and you could hardly wish that I should expose myself to ridicule, can you?"

"Yes," answered Williamson, coldly; for the temperature of his heart had suddenly fallen—"but to expose me to ridicule, that is nothing. What will be thought of it when the originator of the party can find no lady to drive, and is obliged to stay at home?"

"That, indeed, would be laughable," owned Marie Louise, "for a man to sit at home to lament over a disappointed expectation! Let me not believe that!"

"No, believe it not," rejoined Williamson, at the same time angry and convinced; "I will seek out one of the superfluous young ladies. When shall you return, Marie Louise?"

"As soon as possible! And believe me, now—I say it in earnest—it grieves me much to go away to-day, when I had promised myself so much pleasure; but the baroness (Mr. Engineer knows what obligations I am under to her) writes and begs me, in the name of God, to go out to her, to help watch at the sick bed of her little daughter. Could I hesitate to share a sorrow with her who so often has made me a sharer in her joys?"

"No; if this is the case, you could not do otherwise. But tell me again—say it right heartily, that it grieves you to be obliged to go away."

"Mr. Engineer, the driver and the horses are getting impatient. I have said all I have to say."

"Then farewell, fare thee well, Marie Louise."

"Farewell," whispered she, blushing.

"Add one word more—a single word—and I will go."

"Farewell, William!"

"Now all is right; go, and God be with you!" said he, emphatically, and he gave the driver himself a sign to proceed.

Over the last look of Marie Louise, as the sledge flew on, lay a cloud that reflected its shade on William's heart; but he chased it away—for if his fate were not irrevocably decided, yet he had grounds for dreams of a blessedness which might yet be realized in the future which lay before him.

* * * * *

Marie Louise was absent for more than a month; and as during this time Williamson had not the slightest inclination for gaiety, his arrears of work were more than made up again. He worked for the season of peace and joy that he fancied awaited him. His only relaxation, with the exception of the hours for meals, which he spent with his kind hosts, were the visits which he paid to Marie Louise's mother; and nothing afforded him greater pleasure than the little proofs she gave him of her good will and friendship. Her confidence in him increased each day. She no longer saw in him a stranger; he was to her a dear son; and without any feeling of reserve or embarrassment, she confided to him her little household cares, or asked of him the advice she needed. Through Williamson's means, who procured for her wood and other commodities from the country at low prices, she was able to lay in stores of what she had formerly been obliged to pay dearly for when bought at the door, or sent for into the town. And if by chance, in his walks through the market, Williamson found out anything particularly good, his opposite neighbor and his old hostess were sure to get it between them.

At last, on a gloomy February afternoon, the sledge from Segerstad drove up to the door of the poor widow. Williamson, at the sight, sprang from his chair with delight, and could with difficulty restrain his impatience as long as politeness demanded. Uneasily he counted the minutes until an hour had passed, and with it had disappeared the carriage of the baroness. At last he stood at the door of the apartment which contained the being dearest to him in the whole world.

As he entered, Marie Louise sat alone at the table, busied with the preparation of some work. At the very first glance, Williamson could perceive that a chill breath had passed over his beautiful flower garden; his blossoming hopes were withered. Marie Louise was, indeed, friendly; nay, more than that, she was kind, but stiff as a rose over which the frost has passed.

"At all times an attentive neighbor," said she, smiling, before Williamson could bring out a word; and the tone was so carefully measured, that he immediately understood the footing on which they were to stand towards one another.

"Something has occurred," thought Williamson. "What, I must learn. She has allowed the influence of another to work on her. But it would never do to play the suppliant lover: then all were lost. Oh, women, how soon they can destroy our loveliest paradise!"

In spite of his cast down hopes, Williamson was of good courage. He thought he had but to do with a light cloud, which would at last give way to the sun.

"Yes, indeed, I pride myself on it; but this is no merit when one has two such interesting ladies as neighbors. Is the little young lady at Segerstad restored to health, that our town has recovered again its brightest star?"

Marie Louise was evidently startled at the careless manner in which Williamson greeted her and spoke. She whom he had hitherto addressed in so reserved a manner, and to whom, at their last parting, he had so plainly confided the secret of his heart, now to be spoken to by him as if to the commonest acquaintance.

"The little Ottavia got better in a couple of weeks; but Segerstad is so attractive."

"I understand. It is quite natural that Miss Marie Louise should take pleasure in society which suits her taste so well. I have always heard Segerstad spoken of as a temple dedicated to liberality and the Graces."

"It is true. The baroness is bewitching. An angel of goodness to all in distress, she is equally distinguished for her cultivation of mind, and her lively manners in society."

"She must be perfection itself. I only cannot understand how Miss Marie Louise is able to tear herself away from this Eden."

"My duties at home."

"Oh, after only a month, it is too soon to think about them."

The blood streamed into Marie Louise's cheeks. "I know not," said she, coldly, "whether I am not the best judge when these duties should assert their claim."

"Without doubt!"

"And, therefore, remarks of this nature—"

"Are quite unbecoming?"

"And, nevertheless, Mr. Engineer has—"

"Has ventured to make such? Very true, and I should be ready on my knees to apologize for such boldness, had I not, as an attentive neighbor—you were pleased to bestow on me this title—observed how much it grieved my good friend, your mother, to be so long separated from her daughter. Former sorrows are often revived in solitude, and during the hours that Mistress N—— has permitted me to spend with her, it was her greatest, I may almost say, her only pleasure to count the days until the return of her daughter,—a return so often postponed."

"I know," said Marie Louise, with stifled emotion, "that Mr. Engineer has been very kind to mamma, and I am the first to wish to thank him for it. But it was quite with mamma's will and permission that I remained away."

"She is too good to wish anything than what Miss Marie Louise herself wished—but I have perhaps detained you too long! Can I not see my good neighbor, your mother, this evening?"

"Mamma is busy with her chocolate. If it is agreeable to you, I will tell her that ——"

"Ah, no, do not trouble yourself on my account. I will do myself the pleasure of calling *another time!" and, with* a bow, Williamson took his leave as quietly as if he were the neighbor in the under instead of the upper story.

"What means this change?" said Marie Louise to herself.

"The spirit of pride and convention has taken possession of her at the baronial Segerstad. I only wish it lay in New Holland!" said Williamson, as, much less calm than he seemed, he crossed the street to his own home.

"The Engineer Williamson has been here, mamma," said Marie Louise, with averted face, as her mother entered a short time afterwards.

"And why is he no longer here?" asked her mother, both vexed and surprised at the same time.

"Indeed—I do not know."

"You do not know?—very certain you *do* know; that one can hear in your tone. Have you already forgotten what I just now said, and what I wrote to you often, that Williamson has been more friendly, more tender to me than a son?"

"No, dear mamma, I have not forgotten."

"And yet he is gone already?"

"I said I would call you—but he must be busy."

"There is something more in all this, Marie Louise! I remarked directly I spoke to you of Williamson that your countenance changed, and I must say, my child, that I have long suspected that your constant visits to Segerstad have injured, I will not say the purity of your heart—since I trust that is too firmly rooted—but the purity of your mind. Every time that you come back from it, you are more full of pretension, pride, and caprice. A poor girl, even though she may be of good birth, is not on an equality with a rich baroness, however she may be treated by her as a sister. This kindness ought, on the contrary, to make you reflect on the difference there is in your rank, and render you more humble and thankful."

"I cannot be humble," answered Marie Louise, in a low voice; "but thankful I am, towards those who never let me feel that I am poor."

"Good God! my child," sighed Mistress N——, with the deep anguish of a true mother, who fears that her child is about to commit an error. "Alas! how different are the feelings that you express to-day from those which were awakened in your mind on New

Year's day, and from which I promised myself so much joy."

Marie Louise was silent.

"I know the Baroness of Segerstad and the fine company that is going out and in there very little," continued her mother—"but you shall go no more there."

"Mamma, I have promised to go back again in a fortnight."

"That you may have done; but I say a most earnest No—remember that; it is time to set limits to your self-sufficiency. Towards your own mother, I trust it is not to be displayed."

"No, mamma!" replied Marie Louise, whilst she reverently kissed her mother's hand. "But there is some one here on whose account I must go away. When he has left, I will return."

"Williamson?"

"Yes."

The mother shook her head in sorrow. "You wish to destroy all my hopes," said she. "He is young, handsome, good, and has a profitable profession—what more is wanted?"

"He is—I believe—I mean—they say, that he is intemperate, although I must say that this fault, which I have more than any other a horror of, has been carefully concealed here."

"Williamson intemperate!—are you in your senses?"

"I know it for certain, mamma. I have heard of it from good authority, that he lives sometimes in the very worst company, and in peasants' huts and in islands whole weeks over the time necessary for his business. And the person with whom on these occasions he has spent his time in such noble pleasures, and with whom he is very intimate, is a man of intemperate habits and bad reputation; the same who in the autumn paid Williamson a visit; whom we saw go in, and whom to conceal he drew down the blinds. I remember the circumstance quite well."

"Nonsense, Marie Louise! How can you believe such a tale? How can you give more credit to the stupid inventions than to your own sound judgment? It requires certainly no extraordinary reason to see that Williamson is as far from being an intemperate man as that your good sense has wandered out of the right path. Who could have told you all that?"

"*It was related* at Segerstad by the baron, *as well as the baroness*, and also by cousin Malcolm. The latter ought to know very well about it, since this person, the Brandy-Advocate Pellander, as he is called, has a lawsuit to conduct for him, and has talked about himself and the engineer having all kinds of adventures together for a whole week just before Williamson came into the town."

"As if that could not have happened accidentally."

"No, their acquaintanceship must be very intimate, since the engineer calls this nice person 'uncle.'"

"There may be also some reason for this; and all that can be said about this trifling affair is neither more nor less than that they have got up a story to lower Williamson in your eyes, and that you have shown yourself only too ready to receive the calumny as truth. But he shall justify himself."

"Not for the world. You would not surely say a word to him on the subject?"

"In this matter I shall act as it best pleases me."

CHAPTER X.

Canst thou more desire,
Than love alone can give?
GRAFSTRÖM.

WILLIAMSON let three days pass over before he renewed his visit.

This time he found Mistress N—— alone. He had purposely chosen a time when he knew that Marie Louise would be absent on a visit. Williamson congratulated his neighbor on the fulfilment at last of her desire. "How happy must you now be!" said he.

She answered frankly, "That I cannot exactly say. Marie Louise gives me much cause for uneasiness."

"How so?" asked Williamson, turning pale.

"That detestable Segerstad does her no good. The time was—but that is so long ago that I can scarce remember it—when I myself was a fine lady, a lady of property. Nothing do I desire less, though, than that Marie Louise should be the one, seeing that she cannot be the other. In Segerstad, however, I really believe she fancies to herself that she can lay claim to everything."

"The good sense of your daughter——"

"Alas! my good Engineer Williamson,

people are blind when under the influence of self-love and vanity."

"You must not be too severe, my good friend."

"Alas!" said the excited mother, feeling a desire to confide in one who could understand her so well, "would to God I had not been too weak at first! I have always remarked that Marie Louise aspired too high, but I feared that too much preaching on this point would only make the matter worse, therefore I have been too sparing of it."

"But what do you refer to at present?"

"Ah," said she, blushing, for as Williamson had not yet declared himself, it was difficult for her to explain exactly what she meant—"ah, it is much!"

"A stranger," continued Williamson, with tenderness of manner, "cannot ask for full confidence, but my good friend knows that my sympathy is warm and sincere."

"That I believe, or rather I am certain of it."

"And when your daughter went away," added he, as he drew his chair nearer, "I had a hope, a slight hope, that I was not disagreeable to her." A respectful kiss on her hand left her to guess his meaning.

"I thought so myself, also; and from what I know of the character and actions of Engineer Williamson, it would be a little proof of good sense or delicacy, were I to pretend I did not understand his own feelings."

"How can I thank you enough for this confidence!" said Williamson, warmly. "That I can only attempt when the day comes that crowns my hopes! Yet I must say that when I was last here, Miss Marie Louise gave me plainly to understand how foolish was the hope that I had ventured to cherish."

"That I can well understand. But all is not lost. You could never imagine, Mr. Engineer, what foolish stories have been put together to interfere with the possible inclination of Marie Louise in a certain direction."

"How!—calumny! God be thanked, then all may be right again. For though I am not more perfect than other sons of Adam, yet I have upon my conscience the weight of no bad action at which I need blush."

"I felt convinced of that beforehand! It has been asserted of Mr. Engineer—forgive me if I am frank, though, considering the position in which we stand, and that in which we may stand in future, I am unwilling to run *the risk of having to* reproach myself for making matters worse—but it has been asserted that Mr. Engineer has not always lived in the best society, that he is a little inclined to intemperance in his habits, and has therefore got into rather unseemly affairs."

"That is rather too strong!" exclaimed Williamson, pale with anger. "Good God! I never imagined that such things could be said of me. Has any particular affair been mentioned?"

"No; but one of the intimate acquaintances of the engineer's, an advocate of the name of Pellander——"

"Oh, thank Heavens! comes the wind from that quarter," said Williamson, with a lightened heart; "then I can soon clear myself, which, under any circumstances, I hope I could have done. But it pains and grieves me deeply that she could have given credence to such a miserable tissue of truth and falsehood."

"Truth?"

"Yes, truth; you shall yourself judge this part of the history."

As quick as lightning Williamson flew over the street, and returned back with his "Sketch;" which he had copied and preserved, as he was accustomed to do with similar letters written home to his friends, in order that he might have an opportunity afterwards, in mature years, of laughing over the adventures of his youth.

"There, my good friend, read this from beginning to end, and my acquaintance with Pellander will, I trust, be fully explained. I must, however, beg you to be so good as to remember that this was written three months ago to a confidential friend. It would therefore, perhaps, be better that your daughter should not read it, as she might find the tone of it rather too free; but in the hands of her experienced mother I venture to place this little epistle without any fear of misapprehension."

After saying this, Williamson took leave, and awaited at home the effect which might be produced by the sketch of "Uncle Pellander" and the last flask of rum.

If our hero had possessed any other means of justifying himself, he would not have adopted this one, since it might not, perhaps, prove the most successful. But be it as it may, he had obeyed the suggestion which the vexation of the moment inspired; the result might be favorable or not.

The mother of Marie Louise had such a sufficient conviction of the innate worth of Williamson as to require no proof. Nevertheless, she seized the paper with the greatest feeling of curiosity. During the reading of it a smile often passed over her lips, and she had gone through the little torn off postscript for the second or third time, when Marie Louise returned from her visit, and asked, in astonishment: "Now, what can mamma have got to read so interesting?"

"Well, then, my love, I have been forbidden to let you see it; but I must, in secresy, break through this prohibition. It is a letter which Williamson wrote three months ago to a friend at home."

"Good heavens! How can it have fallen into mamma's hands?"

"In the simplest manner. Williamson was here, and we have had a mutual explanation in the most delicate way, and the burthen of the song is, that he has looked out this letter from his papers."

Marie Louise looked dissatisfied. "I ought to have nothing to say against what mamma thinks it proper to do," said she.

"No, not well, since you must remember, my child, that your mother knew and understood all that concerns propriety long before she had a daughter who fancies she understands it better."

"Ah, now, mamma, you are too severe," sighed Marie Louise, as she took the letter from her mother's hand; "now you are not kind to me."

"Yes, indeed I am, my Marie Louise, even when I am now and then obliged to be severe. But read that, and then beg Williamson's pardon."

"I will read the letter when you are asleep to-night, mamma; I should like to be alone when I read it."

"Do as you please; you will not any how have long to wait, for already I feel sleepy and tired."

In the mysterious stillness of the night the heart speaks clearer than when the confusing and disturbing forms of daylight are coming and going about us, which if they do not quite silence it, at least they so mingle their strange voices with its tones, that its true language is not heard. Marie Louise sits now alone, and by the light of a little lamp she reads Williamson's letter. Her eyes sparkle, her cheeks *flush, her lips smile. She folds* the letter up, *unfolds it, and reads it again.*

Marie Louise knows how to discriminate. She does not mistake the tone of the letter; she recognizes the frank, honest, right-minded man, as well as the lively comrade, full of youthful jokes and excusable levity. She laughed over the scenes with "Uncle" Pellander and his disasters; and at last, even over Williamson's perplexity in having to receive a visit from him when he was the last person whom he wished to see.

But as she proceeded still further, and read Williamson's open confessions about the "wild wood-pigeon," as she saw into his heart, and found there everywhere her own image, then it became also with her "too warm." Tears burst from her eyes, and she inwardly implored pardon for her unjust and unjustifiable want of confidence. Who could so love her or understand her as himself? With delight she lingered over the words—"She is none of your drooping lilies, who are always wanting a support, for she can support herself, that I assure you."

These words decided the victory for Williamson. Marie Louise was flattered, touched, appeased. From this moment there intervened a little period which was highly favorable to his hopes. But Williamson was sensitive and delicate-minded; deeply he felt the wound which the suspicions of Marie Louise had inflicted; and besides this, he loved too deeply and nobly to avail himself of this temporary change in his favor in order to bind himself for life. It cost him much, it is true, to defer the important hour; but the woman to whom he should devote his whole soul should first learn to know him better; she should have time to judge whether the influence of others was greater than his—greater than that of her own heart. He ventured to add the latter, for he could never forget the tone of her voice as she called him by his name at parting.

The winter, meanwhile, drew to an end, and the time approached when Williamson's business called him into the country again.

Often, almost daily, in this interval, did he visit his opposite neighbors, and laid open his heart so completely, that at times it seemed to Marie Louise as if he had spoken the important words, and that she had already answered, "I will be thine!" This was the time of her happiness, for then did Marie Louise follow the appealing voice of her own heart, that yet possessed power enough to stifle all other voices.

As Williamson took leave, he felt almost certain that had he at that moment asked her to be his, she would have consented. He was determined, however, that his proposal should be taken into consideration when free from the emotion of leave-taking, and when it could be viewed in calmness and solitude. And Marie Louise thanked him inwardly for this delicacy of feeling, which forwarded, rather than injured, his interests.

Now was he gone, and Marie Louise had undisturbed time to reflect on the decision that she would shortly have to make.

Williamson's pecuniary circumstances were not known to her from himself, but from the Utters her mother learnt that he had inherited only a very moderate fortune, the greater part of which had been spent in qualifying himself for his profession. Thus, for the present, his position in life, although good, could not be considered brilliant. He had but lately become a government land-surveyor. At the same time, through his uninterrupted activity and honorable conduct, he had won himself an excellent reputation, and much business had been confided to him. There was no doubt but that in the future he would become a wealthy man.

"Yes, in the future," thought Marie Louise. "That is a long way off—and, meanwhile——," it was after another visit to Segerstad that Marie Louise so thought. At the beginning of May she received a letter, the handwriting of which was familiar to her. With a trembling hand she broke the seal. The letter ran thus:—

"I know that Marie Louise will not be astonished at my boldness, in writing direct to her; for long, very long, has she known what this letter contains.

"Yet, ere I proceed, will she allow me, as the woman whose favor I seek, to speak in the tones with which I address her in my own heart?

"Marie Louise! If it were not sweeter than all else to say to you, I love you above all things! I would be silent, for this is nothing new to you, and you will understand all that is contained in the question which I put before you. Marie Louise, have you well considered? Can the humble land-surveyor, who has nothing to offer you but a warm heart and a moderate income, can he hope that you will deem this lot rich enough to share with him?

"I must restrain myself, not to break forth in the language of passion. I am feverish with restlessness, hope, and fear; I suffer beforehand all the martyrdom of a *no*, and I enjoy the blessedness of Heaven when my imagination dreams of a *yes*. So is my mind tossed to and fro, that you would perhaps both weep and laugh, could you enter it and see the disturbance that reigns there. Wholly occupied is it with the form of my idol, but according as my hopes rise or fall in the scale is the clothing of this form changed. A thousand times a day is it now draped with a rose-colored veil of joy, now with mourning crape.

"What an unlimited power has this feeling which we call love over the soul! What a strange condition of mind it occasions! Must it not resemble madness? Yet I should not speak thus—thus rave. I will be rational—be worthy of Marie Louise. Oh, God! grant that my sighs may be heard; grant that she for whom it would be so sweet to live and work, and a glance from whose eyes can so multiply my powers, grant that she may have sufficient confidence to contentedly love me, and with joy become mine!

"In three days—this is the longest term that my heart and my reason can endure—I come myself to receive the answer that is everything to me. "WILLIAM."

Marie Louise let the letter fall on her lap. What at this moment passed through her soul we know not, but that it was much and manifold one could judge by the changing color of her cheeks, and by the clouds and flashes which alternately passed over her eyes.

CHAPTER XI.

Alas, there standest thou, as once did I,
With desolation in thy heart,
Alone with memories of pain.

"Now, welcome, ten thousand times welcome, my dear little engineer!" said Mistress Utter, whilst with motherly tenderness she embraced her lodger, now become so dear to her. He also pressed the old lady in his arms, with a warmth that betrayed the excitement of his feelings.

"Enough, enough, you are squeezing me to death!" said she, as, with a good-humored smile, she withdrew from his rather too forcible exhibition of affection. "But just see how tanned and sunburnt our engineer has become! You must have gone through much fatigue, I can well imagine, wandering about in dust and heat."

"Yes, indeed, mine is not always a pleasant occupation, dearest Aunt Gretchen. Yet let us have some coffee with all speed, for I must dress myself and go into the town."

"In the town? yes; I suspect you will not go very far. But be good enough to allow yourself time to rest, as becomes all prudent people."

"No, by heavens, no! I am prudent, that I know. I must be off!" cried Williamson, whom she in vain tried to keep on the sofa. And away from his hostess and her coffee sprang the impatient lover.

As he reached his own room, he met Carl with a note in his hand. With a foreboding fear, Williamson tore it from him, broke the seal, and saw the words—"Not to-day—I cannot possibly! To-morrow morning I shall be at home.—M. L."

Williamson went into his bed-chamber, and locked the door after him. His blood, heated by his journey, and by the severe fatigue he had gone through in order to be able to pay a visit of two days to the town, which was all he could allow himself, received through this despatch such an increase of feverish excitement, that it throbbed in his veins till he felt almost delirious. In vain his well-meaning hostess knocked at the door, his non-appearance and movements awakening her attention; but she received only the answer, "Aunt Gretchen, I have altered my mind. I am not going out. I feel so exhausted with travelling all night in the rain, after several days of very hard labor, that I think it will be better for me to lie down. I know my good little aunt will excuse me." Williamson had a positive horror of seeing or hearing any one, whoever they might be—even the tone of a human voice—ere his fate was decided. And perhaps the wisest thing that he could do, was to spend the interval in a condition between sleeping and waking.

The next morning at nine o'clock he stood, with feelings somewhat more calm, at his window, and looked over to that of his neighbors. He perceived a glimpse of Marie Louise, and, already for a long time dressed and in order ready for his visit, he took his hat, *flew down stairs*, and stood the next moment *before her in whose* hands lay his destiny.

Evidently agitated—she had not expected him so soon—she took her seat at one end of the sofa, and with a motion of her hand offered him the other.

Williamson, however, did not sit so far away, but close to her, and whilst he seized her hand and pressed it tenderly between his own, he said, in quick and broken words,—

"No more delay! Believe me, I am sufficiently tortured. Speak—speak quickly! May I hope that Marie Louise will not reject me?"

Marie Louise trembled so violently, that for a moment she was wholly incapable of speaking, and in her eyes and whole appearance lay something that revealed so plainly what was going on in her heart, that Williamson's boldness was at least pardonable, as, yielding to the rapture of hope, he threw his arm around her to press her to his breast, and spare her the acknowledgment.

But it was this movement which called forth all the terror of Marie Louise at the immense importance of the moment. This moment which, once past, could never, by tears, nor through repentance, be recalled, was too great to be so quickly spent—a whole life was to pay for it! She feared, she trembled—she had not enough considered. Almost with harshness she repelled his embrace.

"Marie Louise!" were the only words that he spoke; but his looks conveyed a reproach that she could scarcely stand. She cast down her eyes, and leaned her head upon her hand.

A few seconds passed in painful silence.

"I have not yet had time enough," stammered out Marie Louise at last, overwhelmed by the conflict of her feelings.

"How much time is then necessary?" asked Williamson, as he struggled to appear calm. "I can only remain two days, and I ventured to dream that they would have passed more happily."

"Give me—give me time—till to-morrow evening."

"Till the last moment of my stay? Ah, Marie Louise, that is not right!—yet, I submit. Let me at least, then, meet with no evasion."

"No, no! To-morrow I shall have decided."

* * * * *

Good old Mistress Utter stood on the watch, and waited for the moment when her little engineer would be back. She understood perfectly well where he had gone; and now that she saw Williamson return so soon, with so gloomy a countenance, she was not only vexed, but in the highest degree angry with the "ladies in the bow-windowed room, who, instead of giving themselves airs, ought to be grateful for the honor the engineer did them."

"Come in, William, come!" said the old lady, and opened her own door, as the engineer hoped to be able to slip up the stairs unobserved.

"No, my good aunt, I think it will be best for me to be alone. I am a little bewildered to-day."

"Yes, that I can well see; and therefore you must forgive your old friend if she is a little troublesome. But you may well believe that I am not very joyful to-day. What! has she given you a basket?" And as she said this she had contrived to shut the door between Williamson and listeners.

"Not exactly; but she has not considered enough. To-morrow evening, my good aunt," and he nodded cheerfully to the old lady.

"Aha! I know where the shoe pinches; she has not yet received an answer from the Baroness Segerstad. Without her advice, Marie Louise does nothing."

"Is, then, my happiness to depend upon her decision?" said Williamson, with flashing eyes.

"So it is. And since my old man has already gone to the council room—for he could not wait breakfast for you—let us sit here on the sofa, and have a few reasonable words together. Look you, my good engineer, I understand these matters, and I must tell you that this fine lady the baroness, who has always advocated the cause of the yearly suitor from Malcolm's-Ness, has never been favorable to you. Therefore, I am of the opinion that the best you can do is to give the matter up!"

"Impossible! I have the more foundation for believing that, in this case, this lady's omnipotence will effect nothing, since it has failed in the other. Marie Louise does not allow herself to be led, even when she has sought and listened to advice."

"Indeed she does, and even against her own inclination, provided her pride is brought into play."

"Her pride!"

"Well, well! do not get red! I believe, and the whole town thinks so likewise, that she could not make a better match than the one you offer her. But, as I have said before, she has high blood in her. I am curious to see how it will end; the spirit of pride is a powerful tempter. We shall see! we shall see!"

"Yes, we shall see," said Williamson, as he arose; and crossing the room, laid his hand upon the handle of the door.

"But one word more—and you must give me your hand on it," continued the old lady, as she stopped him at the door. "If you do not want to lose your chance through your own fault, then do not shut yourself up in this way in your own room, as if you were a criminal waiting for judgment; that will do no good with the girl. On the contrary, you must go out into the town and pass by her window, and eat and drink like other people, and walk as upright as if you had swallowed a poker, and pay visits, and gossip, and give answers, and behave in all respects as if you had no intention to hang yourself to-morrow morning, in case you get a basket."

"I thank you for the advice," rejoined Williamson, with a smile. "I will follow it, although I am so full of thought and care."

And Williamson fulfilled the wise prescription of Aunt Gretchen, by which the time, though long, was not so heavy on his hands, as in complete solitude. On the last half day, however, he could not but remain alone; and pacing up and down, his eyes constantly fixed on the clock, he counted the minutes until the hour-hand pointed to six.

"Now it must be evening," cried he, greatly excited. "Now must all be decided."

* * * * *

The mother of Marie Louise would not make her appearance until the weather was settled, and had withdrawn to the inner room, where she remained, as restless as Mistress Utter, behind the curtains, to await the issue of the last interview, respecting which her daughter had only said the words, "I must follow no advice but my own."

With composure, Marie Louise received her lover this day; and as she immediately observed that he was not able to open the conversation, she had courage enough to do it herself.

"My good Engineer Williamson, I —"

"Oh, nothing more is needful," said Williamson, interrupting her; and his cheeks became as white as the dress of Marie Louise. "I can guess the conclusion of the discourse."

"Do not misunderstand me," stammered she, whilst she blushed perhaps as much before herself as before him.

"No; I cannot mistake motives which lie revealed so plainly; it is only to be regretted that for a while they lay concealed under honey-bearing flowers. Ah, Marie Louise! I loved, I idolized you, and I do it, perhaps, still; but know that a man can conquer his passion, when he finds the object of his deep devotion no longer worthy of his esteem."

"What is meant by this?" asked Marie Louise proudly, yet not without confusion.

"It means that a young woman who lays the holiest feelings of her heart in the scale of calculation, and who, in this struggle, disdains simple domestic happiness to await in the future more flattering prospects, can awaken no feeling of regret at her loss."

"Truly, Mr. Engineer over estimates here the weight of his influence; and it is not, perhaps, a little vain to assert, that such feelings and such a struggle have never existed. I, at least," added she, with trembling lips, "know not how he can justify such an assumption."

"Because, young lady, every one, in such a case, has a right to speak openly to the woman, who, after having accepted and encouraged his attentions, and twice begged for time to consider his suit, which a woman does not do when she has decided on a refusal, thus proves that she has been pleased to trifle with his feelings and his honor."

Marie Louise, who, to tell the truth, had prepared herself for entreaties and despair, appeared divided between the irritation she felt at this bold speech and her sympathy with his manly words; nevertheless, neither the one nor the other should influence the decision that she had irrevocably made.

The lot that Williamson had offered her seemed to her proud spirit meaner than it really was. The wife of a government land-surveyor, who must come into contact with all kinds of people, assistants, and God knows what, must become vulgar, and perhaps has to expect, afterwards, reduced circumstances, poverty, a cottage in the country, want, the cries of children, diminished affection,—no; that was not the lot that she sought! She loved Williamson, but not deeply, not purely enough to wish to share with him a precarious fate. She had, also, the example of her mother before her eyes. What had she not become through a marriage without fortune? No, no! Poverty is hard to bear alone—unbearable as a wife, the mistress of a family, and mother!

"I think," said Marie Louise, breaking the silence which had followed Williamson's last words, "that it is beneath my dignity to answer these accusations. Perhaps the best thing that we can do, would be to say farewell to each other."

Williamson bowed, without giving an answer, and found himself outside the door; he knew not how. But after he had stood for a few moments leaning himself against the banisters, he discovered that he was without his hat, and he went in again to fetch it.

But what a sight was there! Marie Louise lay dissolved in tears, wringing her hands.

Williamson darted forward. "Oh, God! Oh, God!—you see, Marie Louise, you see!"

"What?" said she, restraining, with a powerful effort, the tempest of her sorrow.

"That your heart will also break."

"Not from love," rejoined she. "Believe it not, William; I am not so weak. But it is a bitter thought to have lost the esteem of one who was so dear to me."

"Then let all be changed, Marie Louise; chase away this bad, this false feeling which stands between thee and me. Believe me, love is higher, sweeter, holier than wealth and all that it can bring: let not the purity of thy soul be sullied any longer by a stain which is unworthy of thee and of pure womanhood."

"Do not speak so, William; it is in vain. What I have resolved stands unchanged—Farewell."

"Then, indeed, farewell, Marie Louise; fare thee well for ever."

"It is all over," said Williamson, with unnatural calmness, to his motherly friend; and opening the window which looked on the yard, he called out, "Carl, prepare the chaise."

"Not this evening, William," entreated the old woman anxiously.

"Yes, this very night; I must be out in the fresh air and away to my business."

"Ay, you must, anyhow, think of that."

"I must think of it. I have an appointment for early the day after to-morrow; and it shall not be said that I have made a fool of myself about a woman. If I should now and then talk a little confused, or hear amiss, yet I will still attend to my business; work shall be my only physician."

"That is said so that I could shed tears of joy over you. But how long will it be until we see you again?"

"Probably not till the autumn—but then I hope to be sound again in mind and heart."

Marie Louise saw the chaise drive up, and Williamson immediately afterwards come out of the house in travelling costume. The counsellor and his wife stood on the steps.

Marie Louise's mother, who sat at the window of her inner room, with tearful eyes, nodded a farewell. Williamson took off his hat respectfully and returned her expressive greeting by a low bow.

Then all disappeared. The chaise rolled away. The mother opened softly the door into the outer room. Marie Louise lay mute, and with fixed eyes, like a marble statue, on the sofa.

Part the Second.

CHAPTER XII.

So the story goes . . .
Read what follows here.
DAHLGREN

"As I tell you—on my honor, just as I tell you, brother Will'son. Stop a bit: it was Friday evening that a courier came and drove up into my court. I lay in a pleasant dose, and was at that moment thinking how I could best get through the heap of suits that I have to conduct at the next sessions, when, all at once, some one began to knock and make a disturbance at the door, making as great a riot as if they had brought all the trumpets of the day of judgment with them. 'Olle, Peter, Lasse!' cried I, now wide awake—for I do not like every body in the house to be in bed at the same time, as one might be robbed and murdered without knowing anything about it—'Olle and Lasse,' I cried, 'do you hear yon dogs?'"

"Go on, go on!" said Williamson, as, about three months after the period when we last left him, he sat at his writing table in a decent little chamber in a peasant's cottage.

"Go on, yes, but you must not be in too great a hurry, brother; quietness in all things, that is my motto. Meanwhile came Lasse at my call, and exclaimed: 'Good Lord! who would have thought this! The squire of Malcolm's-Ness has been upset in returning home from the market at Lo, and is at the point of death—and before he goes, he wants to speak with master a bit.' 'Very good, very good!' said I, rubbing my hands, as I always do when I see a good job before me. I never grudge having to go out at nights, and therefore was not long before I stood before *the shining face of* my great patron. But how pale was he now, poor man! He had been upset, was crushed to pieces, and must die; so he wanted beforehand to make his will, for which business, as brother Will'son well knows, he could find no more suitable lawyer than your humble servant, who has settled and arranged more than one in his time."

"And the will of the dying man?"

"Was this; that setting aside the legal entail, his whole property, that is, the beautiful estate of Malcom's-Ness, and all and everything, should go to his beloved relative, Miss Marie Louise N——."

Williamson sprang from his chair, and took two or three turns up and down the room with his hand pressed to his brow. "Now," thought he to himself, with a bitter sigh, "now is the last hope, the last possible chance destroyed. Oh, Marie Louise!"

"Does the young lady already know of her good fortune?" said he, as he turned to Pellander, who, half intoxicated and half asleep, sat on the bed.

"Yes, indeed, the last possessor of Malcolm's-Ness, as we may now call him, made it over to her with his own hands."

"The young lady was present?"

"Of course! They had sent for her from Segerstad, and she came in company with the baron and baroness."

"And how did the event seem to affect her?"

"Remarkably well! She had, it is true, a few tears at hand for the death of her cousin, and played a right sorrowful part in the death-bed scene; but on the whole, it was just as if she had always had it all before. She behaved herself like a countess, and greeted me as if I were a sort of valet, and not the person through whose hands she becomes what she now is,—the silly thing."

"Excuse me, Pellander—I am not quite well!" said Williamson, and taking his hat went out for a walk in the wood. He felt that at this moment he must be alone.

When he returned home late in the evening, Pellander had fallen asleep, and this time he slept so profoundly, that Williamson had him carried out of the room; after which he lighted his lamp and sat down to his writing, determined to extinguish, in a flood of business, the burning thoughts that seemed to set his blood in flames.

* * * * *

Into every corner of the district penetrated black-bordered notes, announcing that Squire Malcolm M——, of Malcolm's-Ness, had departed this life. A stately funeral kept up his remembrance for three weeks; in the fourth, nothing was spoken of but the rich and distinguished heiress who had taken for the winter the suite of apartments on the first floor of the house of Merchant P——, in the Market-place. Not before the spring would she take possession of Malcolm's-Ness.

Meanwhile, Mistress N——, who saw more with fear than joy this change in the fortunes of her daughter, continued to live in her little bow-windowed room. She wished to remain there until the new apartments were ready for their occupation. Marie Louise was almost always at Sagerstad, where we will also pay a fugitive visit.

It is a cool autumn evening, of that character which awakens melancholy thoughts. In the saloon at Sagerstad, through whose broad antique window the moon threw a broken light upon the dark oak floor, sat Marie Louise. She was reclining negligently in an easy-chair, with one foot resting on a soft and swelling footstool, her eyes fixed thoughtfully on the patch of moonlight on the floor, which, in her fantasy, was widened into a stream, on whose surface strange figures hovered.

Now was seen surrounded with gleaming wax tapers, the silver-mounted bier of Squire Malcolm M——, in all its pomp; now rose up a young and agile form. It was the man, at whose name alone her heart so beat that its pulsations could be heard,—and he looked at her with a glance in which sorrow and contempt were mingled. At last appeared her own form, but not plainly, and it showed itself only on the borders of the silver flood, then sunk and rose again, without emerging from the stream, till the shadowy form faded away and disappeared as the door opened and a servant entered with the lights. With light came cheerfulness again. A beautiful child, little Ottavia, came dancing in, and called Marie Louise by her name. Behind the lovely sylph came a young and handsome woman in the full bloom of womanhood; it was the Baroness Charlotte, the early protectress of Marie Louise.

"What are you about here, so lonely, Marie Louise?" said she, with a slight *reproach* in her tone, "I do believe you are *indulging in day-dreams* again."

"*No, I have done* with day-dreaming; I was only thinking of some of my old dreams," answered Marie Louise, as she seated herself near the baroness, at a little work-table which stood in the wide recess of the window.

Ottavia played at her mother's feet, and the baroness performed the part of a mother most becomingly, though a close observer would have remarked that her love was shown more in pretty, tender caresses than in a comprehension of the high duties of a mother.

"Little Ottavia must go now with her doll, and play out there on the rug; here, near the window, there is a draught, which is not good for Ottavia, who has just been ill;" and with a caress the little one was got rid of.

"Now, dear Marie Louise! Now we are quite alone; children ought never to overhear, when ladies talk over certain matters. Tell me now," and here a significant smile played round the lips of Baroness Charlotte, "whether you have left off mourning over your ideal surveyor? Do you not perceive that Heaven itself has interfered in the matter? Just think, if this match had been irrevocably decided on before this brilliant change in your circumstances took place?"

"It was a punishment from Heaven, rather than a good interposition, that it should happen so perversely," said Marie Louise.

"Perversely!—what a singular expression! In my opinion, the affair has gone quite right all through."

"Ah, no! If Williamson had but made his proposal three months later, or cousin Malcolm his will three months sooner, all would have been very different."

"Oh, if all that you want is an alteration in the reckoning of time, you could doubtless find a very willing assistant—nothing is easier."

"Nothing more difficult in the position in which we now stand! Williamson will never seek me again."

"I should consider that a very fortunate circumstance. Besides, it is not more than his duty—for the heiress of the Malcolm's-Ness is fruit that hangs too high for him."

"Do not speak so, Charlotte! I can never forget that he considered the poor young girl of the bow-windowed room as a most desirable match."

"For him it certainly was, and the best of it was that the poor young girl disdained him."

"But the rich one,—I must own, to you,

would not do so, if he thought her worthy that he should forget the past."

"That is indeed laughable," said the baroness, with an impatient motion of her beautiful head; "you had better anticipate this state of the case, and go and woo him again yourself."

Marie Louise blushed to the brow. "I woo him myself?" said she, hurt and half-offended. "I may confide to you my most inmost thoughts respecting a matter which is quite out of the question, but you must not therefore believe that for a single second I should forget my own dignity and the modesty of my sex."

"Now I recognize again my noble, proud, own Marie Louise. You really frightened me a little! Your character has so many strange whims in it—but I am not satisfied that you should have taken a dwelling in the town. You had much better have spent the winter with your mother out here in Segerstad, as you will not go till spring to Malcolm's-Ness."

"No; I am vain enough to wish to make my old envious friends still more envious. Besides this, I like the society of the little town much."

"I live only six miles from this town," said the baroness, with emphasis, "and go there not more than three times in the year."

"Therefore you do not get to know the people. Now, however, I hope that you will find accommodation in our house, and the society there——"

"Ah, I know it," interrupted the baroness, "yet we are thinking of going to Stockholm. What do you say to following us?"

"A hearty 'No.' I feel no inclination for it; at least not at present."

"Your inclination has a more unassuming object," observed the baroness, ironically, and called the little Ottavia to her, in order to put an end to the conversation.

* * * * *

In her spacious apartments in the Market-place, Marie Louise, at the beginning of October, entered on a brilliant mode of life on a small scale. Her mother, who now, as formerly, was delicate in health, and more than ever anxious and sorrowful, did not like constant company, and often retired early. But Marie Louise could do the honors for both, and received many people, both out of the town and from the country. The only persons *who had not accepted* her invitations with gratitude were the old Utters. They had not even returned the visit which she had paid them on her return to the town.

The autumn passed, and the winter was half over. It was the beginning of January, when Carl stopped one day with the engineer's empty chaise before the counsellor's house. "In Heaven's name, what is the matter?" cried Mrs. Utter, as she tore a letter out of his hand. It was not Williamson's hand; not even his signature. As the counsellor was not at home, the old lady opened and read the letter, which was addressed to her husband. It ran thus:

"A very intimate friend and old acquaintance of the Engineer Williamson begs to announce to the worthy Counsellor Utter, that the aforesaid Engineer Williamson is at the point of death, having lain for the last six weeks at the Radeboda Farm, in the Hörnö Mountains, ill of a fever, which he at first thought unimportant, but which will now very probably put an end to his good and active career in life. As I yesterday came into the neighborhood respecting the division of an estate, and found the above-mentioned good friend unable to take care of himself, I consider it my duty to beg his worthy host to endeavor to send a doctor to him; for which purpose I send his servant with his chaise. Williamson's two assistants, who come here from time to time, have both assured me that it has been only the determined objection of aforesaid which has prevented medical assistance being called in sooner.

"In the name of humanity,

"JOSIAS PELLANDER, Attorney."

"Radeboda, Jan. 4, 18—."

"Nina! Britta! Lisa! my dear children, run as fast as your legs can carry you: one to the club and one to the burgomaster's, to find the counsellor, and tell him that an affair of great importance requires him at home."

As soon as the old lady had issued these commands, she poured out for Carl a glass of spirits, and begged him, in Heaven's name, to tell her how it had all come about.

"Now, then, it came about in this way," began Carl. "In autumn we had some business in Linemark, and the engineer, for three days, was cold and wet, up to his knees in mud. Then we took up our winter quarters at Anches Manson's, in Radeboda, so that, as the engineer said, we should not be interrupted in our work by any visits to the town before Christmas. But see you, he was rather out in his reckoning; for instead of working, there he lay, first with an attack on the chest, and then he got worse and worse, until it came to what it is now."

"And is it really so bad, Carl, as it says in the letter?"

"Yes, indeed, though I don't well know what he has said; but Pellander knows how to set it down. But any how, may I take the liberty to observe, that between this and Radeboda is a horrible long bit of road, and I have not had the heart to stop more than once on the way to get something to eat."

The old lady hastened to comply with this hint from Carl, and whilst he busied himself to do honor to the remains of the dinner the conversation continued.

"But would he neither send for us nor for the doctor?"

"No, he would not hear of it; for our young gentlemen—we have two of them now—often wanted to persuade him. He always answered, that it was all nothing, and would do very well without a doctor's help."

Mistress Utter looked through the window to see whether the counsellor was not coming. "Yes, surely; there he comes with his coat flying. Now we shall consult together and adopt some plan." Two hours after the arrival of Pellander's letter, the doctor and Carl set off; the latter laden with a host of prescriptions and every thing suitable for an invalid that "Aunt Gretchen" could collect together in haste.

"My dearest, best doctor," were the last words of the old man, as the doctor, before starting, took a parting glass with him, "in God's name make him well again, and persuade him to come to us as soon as possible. Ah, if I could only go with you and nurse him! Tell him, too, that my old wife, whether walking or standing still, will be shedding tears about him."

CHAPTER XIII.

Grief and sorrow ne'er depart—
They only flit from heart to heart.
DAHLGREN.

In her beautiful boudoir, Marie Louise was *pacing up and down;* now standing before the fire-place, where a bright fire blazed, now at the window, from whence she looked up to the sky, now dark with clouds. All that surrounded her bore the stamp of peace and happiness; but the young heiress sighed, nevertheless, for she had already experienced that though riches can provide for many wants, those of the heart remain unsatisfied.

"Lieutenant von Walden begs to know whether the ladies will receive him this evening?" said the femme-de-chambre, entering.

"Yes—no—I do not know; mamma has the headache, and I have—God knows what, but well I am not. Be so good, Ma'mselle Henriette, to say that mamma is not well, and I am keeping her company."

Ma'mselle Henriette retired, but came back shortly, with a disturbed countenance, which awakened the attention of Marie Louise.

"What is the matter?" she asked.

"They say——" Ma'mselle Henriette, who knew pretty well how matters stood with her young mistress, hesitated to say more.

"What, in Heaven's name, is the matter?"

"The doctor has been sent for in haste to a sick person."

"Where?"

"In the country; I do not exactly know where, but they fear that he will arrive too late; the person to whom he is called may perhaps already——"

"It is not the Baroness of Segerstad?"

"Oh, no! it is some one quite different; a person who will be greatly missed in the town here—the Engineer Williamson."

"Williamson!" cried Marie Louise, in such a piercing and heart-struck tone of alarm, that Ma'mselle Henriette started back in affright. "Oh God! oh God! thou art just!" and Marie Louise sank down on the sofa. The distress of her cry brought her mother in. Marie Louise stretched out her arms towards her, and for the first time for many years she wept on her mother's bosom.

"Say nothing! say nothing! have mercy on me!" she faltered out. "I know too well all that mamma would say!"

"No, my child; it would be cruel now to reproach you. The hardest for you is the thought that on this occasion, as his wife, or even as his betrothed, you would have had the right to visit him and nurse him."

"I will go, mamma—I will, I must go to him! He shall not die without my seeing him, without his forgiving me!"

"Impossible! Your reputation?"

"What matters to me my reputation? I care for nothing but him? Have I not suffered enough? Let me go! Old Mistress Utter will accompany me, and——"

"You speak madness, my child. Even should he die, you must remain at home. You have no pretext to justify such a step, and the whole of your life hereafter you might have to repent of having yielded to the impetuosity of your feelings."

"Mamma," said Marie Louise, with a trembling voice, "such a step would convince William that——"

"That you are as changeable as you are capricious. Enough, Marie Louise. It is my duty to watch over you, when you yourself forget that a woman can never transgress the bounds of propriety unpunished."

"Then let me, at least, go over to the Utters."

"Not even that. It would only give rise to tales to your discredit. Ma'mselle Henriette can go and make inquiries about the matter, that perhaps has been greatly exaggerated."

In a fever of anxiety, Marie Louise awaited the return of Ma'mselle Henriette.

Mistress Utter was, either from sorrow or from some other cause, not very communicative, and said it would be best for the ladies to read the letter themselves, which would explain everything; and she gave Ma'mselle the letter. Marie Louise took the letter to the light, and as she saw at the bottom the name of Pellander, the thought struck her how persons whom, at one time, we look on with contempt, or consider unworthy our attention, may often become important, and even dear to us, at others. Without the interference of the advocate, the doctor would not have been sent for; and were William saved, whom must she thank for it, next to God? "God bless him! I will never despise any one again," said she, as her hot tears fell on the strange signature "in the name of humanity."

Overwhelmed and stunned by sorrow, Marie Louise remained for a couple of days in a state of passive dejection, in which she seemed incapable of expressing her feelings by words. Sighs alone passed her lips.

In the mean while, Pellander's kind-hearted intervention was crowned with happy success, the illness having become serious more ***through neglect than through*** its original nature. In a couple of weeks more the patient was so far recovered that he was able to be moved, with all his effects, into the town; which took place at the beginning of February.

"Good God! how sadly you look!" exclaimed Mistress Utter, as she darted here and there about the engineer's little room.

"Nonsense! I shall soon be well under Aunt Gretchen's good prescriptions," was Williamson's consolatory answer. "A young and strong fellow like me does not lose his flesh and color for ever because he has had a little cold."

"Ay, indeed, a fine *little!* What if the messenger had not come——"

"I should have got well again all the same, and without such a hole being made in my purse," added he, laughing.

"God help you! You are the right sort of a man to be able to laugh in time of trouble. But I know that the illness was not the worst of it."

"Yes, indeed it was, otherwise I should have been here at Christmas time, ready to dance at Miss Marie Louise's parties."

"Oh, do not try to deceive the old woman; she sees too clearly for that! But perhaps you mean to cast out your line and hook again—eh?"

"No," answered Williamson, as he relapsed from his feigned cheerfulness into the seriousness which now seldom left him. "No, I shall never angle in that direction again."

"But she was in great trouble about you; that is as certain as day."

"I thank her for it; but nothing more will come of it."

"And she shed tears on this letter here. There! see it yourself! How else could these faint stains have come? I lent them the letter."

"Oh, God knows," answered Williamson, whilst he endeavored to conceal the emotion which the conjectures of Mistress Utter awakened—"that is quite doubtful. It might just as well be a drop or two out of a glass of water which has fallen on it."

"I do not believe that. I have my own decided opinion about it."

"And if it were tears," continued Williamson, "it was only the short-lived impression of the moment which called them forth. Marie Louise cannot love."

The old woman shook her head doubtingly.

"Let her make herself happy in some grand match. Let her shine, and coquette, and lengthen out as long as possible, the dream which she calls Life. The time will come when she will awake, and then, perhaps, she will devote a tear to him who offered her what now she prizes so little—a warm and true heart."

"I see that you are very positive on this point; but wait, my young man, until you have seen her."

"I will see her; but I shall see her without danger, and I can scarcely believe that in her present position she holds me in remembrance."

"Then, tell me, why she did not accompany the Baroness Segerstad, who, a fortnight ago, went to the capital. The baroness was herself twice there to try and persuade her; and one would have thought that that would have just suited the young lady."

"Yes, I am surprised that she should have failed to secure such a good opportunity for shining in the great world as she does here in a little one; yet here she will have admirers and suitors also."

"Of course! The wholesale dealer, Klamer, and the lieutenant—what do they call him?—he who last year was at our New-Year's party, they are both paying their court to her. But the lieutenant, they say, is a gamester. God knows whether it is true."

When Williamson was alone, he sat down in the bow-window, and looked over at the opposite one, the paens of which were now whitened over with frost, for no one lived there. Alas! his hopes were also frozen!

Although Williamson endeavored to appear calm, and with all the strength of mind that he possessed to deaden in constant activity his sense of his sorrow at the destruction of all his youthful hopes of happiness, yet the memory of this loss still gnawed even at his heart, and in those hours when he was left undisturbed to his gloomy reflections, instead of being softened, it became still more bitter.

A noble and manly self-appreciation forbade him, however, to reveal his weakness before the woman that he still adored, or to betray, by word, look, or sign, the unconquerable nature of his passion. So proud was he, that even if—which his self-love did not anticipate—Marie Louise should wish to revive his hopes, he would pretend not to *understand her. She had despised him because he was poor;* he would marry no wife, rich as she might be, who could have cherished such a feeling.

In the mean time Marie Louise waited in the greatest suspense. Already many days had passed since Williamson's return, and he did not appear. At last, one morning, he entered, and after having greeted her mother with the confidence and heartiness of an old friend, he bowed with the greatest politeness to Marie Louise, and with wonderful self-possession congratulated her on the change in her circumstances.

With an evident effort Marie Louise brought out a few unmeaning words. Williamson's tone, his look, his whole deportment, spoke to her only too plainly that he had overcome his former feelings. A deep sigh swelled her heart, but she suppressed it, and started another subject.

The visit did not last long, and in spite of Mrs. N——'s friendly invitations, was not renewed. Yet, on occasions when they had large parties, he would join them, and never forgot, from absence of mind, to ask in good time the young hostess to dance. He gave to their conversation the sportive flight that Marie Louise so loved, without allowing one touch of the feeling of former days to penetrate its tone, and assumed the character of a polished well-bred gentleman, whose only object was to take and give a part in the pleasure of the evening.

When his passion seemed abated, or wholly destroyed, hers became stronger; and the more it developed itself, the more politely cold became his manners. This feeling, which Marie Louise eight months before had been able to master, and which was at that time subordinate to another, threatened now to subdue both reason and pride. It is true she struggled to preserve outward appearances—and really succeeded—but was she mistress of her looks, and above all, of her own mood and spirits, which varied constantly between unnatural excitement and dejection bordering on despair?

As Williamson paid his last farewell visit before going into the country, as usual in spring, her feelings so overcame her that her efforts at concealment were nearly in vain. The lustre of her eyes was clouded, the joke died on her lips, and her hand, that she extended to him at parting, trembled visibly.

"When shall we see each other again, Mr. Engineer?" asked she, with a forced smile.

"Probably next winter—at least I hope so."

A cold chill fell on Marie Louise's heart, and her head grew dizzy; only with an effort could she support herself, as, bowing her head to him, she left the room.

The months passed slowly away.

Whilst Williamson was striving and working to lay the foundation of a future independence—endeavors that seemed more than ever to be crowned with success—Marie Louise, with secret sighs, dragged on the heavy burthen which life had now become. A part of the summer she spent at Malcolm's-Ness with her mother, a part at the sea-side, and everywhere the young Lieutenant von Walden crossed her path. His attentions were not, however, importunate, since he had penetration enough partly to understand the character of Marie Louise. He managed, however, to make his appearance on all occasions without seeming either presuming or intrusive. On their return from their visit to the sea, he ventured to make a more direct advance towards the aim he had in view, and openly declared himself a suitor.

About this time two other individuals were competing for the honor of Marie Louise's hand, the before-mentioned "wholesale dealer," and a slender young "attaché," whom she held in her chains without the slightest preference for either. At last, however, in compliance with her mother's earnest entreaties that she would come to a decision for or against, these two suitors were finally dismissed, whereupon the lieutenant was encouraged to renew his advances. He obtained, it would seem, but little result.

"In my opinion, my child," said her mother one day to her, "you are making the worst selection, if your choice is to be Von Walden."

"I shall not choose him, mamma."

"Why, then, not dismiss him the same as the others?"

"Because he is the only one whose visits and conversation amuse me; he has a little intellect."

"And, perhaps, a little heart as well," replied her mother. "Have you not trifled enough?"

"Nonsense, mamma! there is as little danger with his heart as with the rest. Men possess a great connoisseurship in the art of forgetting."

"Or in the appearance of forgetting, when their reason has rejected the choice which *their hearts once made.*"

"Is not that a very severe remark, dear mamma?"

"You have been able to judge yourself in the matter, my Marie Louise."

"Yes, alas! but what will be the end of all this? What a life is this to lead!"

Her mother shook her head.

"I really think, I will marry before next autumn; it will vex him, perhaps."

"Hush, my child! Have you so incorrect, or rather so unholy a conception of the sanctity of marriage, that you could possibly form this connection on such pitiful motives?"

"Ah, mamma! I know not what I would do. I only know that I am unhappy, and that I would joyfully become poor again, to return again to the situation in which I was when we lived in the bow-windowed room."

"Always the same impetuosity!" said her mother, as she laid her hand on the burning brow of her daughter. "We must bear better and more patiently the results of our own folly, my Marie Louise."

CHAPTER XIV.

Forsaken heart,
For my love temple, my grief,
Shall clothe itself in clouds, and deck itself for sacrifice.

In the autumn, Marie Louise and her mother returned to the town, and the same season of the year brought Williamson also back again. Yet once again, for the last time, would Marie Louise try if the die were irrevocably cast. She met Williamson in company; but this winter she became only too surely convinced, that whatever feeling he might still nourish in his heart—and she could scarcely believe that it had been a transient one—he had most earnestly resolved to subdue it.

"Well, then," said she, one day to herself, as the indifferent manner in which he greeted her as he passed the window made her spirits boil with vexation and brought hot tears over her cheeks, "well, then! I also must conquer my feelings—this must all come to an end!" She took up a note mechanically from the table, which had been placed there, she knew not when or how. Her heart beat as she glanced at the address. Alas! why should she begin to dream again? The note was not from William! She tore it open, however, and saw the signature of Rudolph von Walden.

"Ah!" cried Marie Louise, as she read the elegantly-worded lines in which the lieutenant entreated her to decide on his happiness or misery, "it could not come more opportune!" and without further consideration, and forgetting that her first duty was to consult her mother, she folded up the note, and wrote her answer:

"Lieutenant von Walden will be welcome this evening at six o'clock.

"Marie Louise."

She sealed the note with the same haste with which it was written, and only after it had been dispatched she flew to her mother, and throwing herself with impetuosity into her arms, she exclaimed: "Now is it all over!"

"What, in heaven's name?" asked her mother, in alarm.

"I have given Von Walden decided hopes, and asked him to come this evening at six o'clock."

"Without telling me?"

"Of what use would it have been? Mamma has been always against him, and yet he is the only one with whom I could bear the thought of passing through life."

"You think, perhaps, that he will always be your obedient slave, because he tunes the strings of his guitar at your pleasure, and sings tender songs? But I beg of you, Marie Louise—for it is not too late yet—to change this hasty resolution, to which you have been led by a cause too insignificant to be laid in the scale of your whole future happiness. Remember that your mother speaks from bitter and dearly-bought experience, and act not against my advice! I cannot say why it is so, but my heart has a certain foreboding of unhappiness if you adhere to this choice."

"Ah, dear mamma," answered Marie Louise, whose perturbed spirit would not allow her to give a closer consideration or application of her mother's tender words, "believe me, you feel a prejudice against Von Walden, only because he is a poor soldier. At all events, however, he is a man of honor, whom no woman need blush to be the wife of; and I believe, that is, I mean, that I have determined to be right happy with him."

"Marie Louise! Marie Louise! I tremble for you, my poor child!"

"*Well, then, give* me your hands, dear *mamma! Tell me of,* one bad trait in this man's character, and I will draw back again while there is yet time."

"Would to God I knew of such a trait, instead of only suspecting it," said her mother, sorrowfully; "then, perhaps, I should be happy enough to influence you! All I can do is to entreat you, from my inmost heart, for your mother's sake, not to enter on this engagement!"

Marie Louise walked up and down the room for some minutes without giving any answer. Then, standing before her mother, she spoke in a tone of passion that frightened the tender mother.

"Now then, mamma, I will not enter on this engagement—and I do it all the easier, because it would any how become to me a hateful chain. But mark now what I say: I am not as others; I cannot but be different! the blood often drives through my veins, and it burns like fire when I must force myself to appear cold. Were I to give another man a right to my word and truth, and take upon myself important duties, then I should feel bound and preserved from my most frightful foe: preserved from the power of listening, in a moment of delirium, to the wild ideas that pass through my fancy. Oh, mamma! dearest and only friend, who are so innocent and pure yourself, how can I venture to tell you the sinful thoughts which I have had?" Marie Louise sank at the feet of her mother, and bedewed her hands with her tears.

"Unhappy, misguided child. Will the measure of my grief never be filled!" The tears of the mother were mingled with those of her daughter; long they remained in a silent embrace.

"At least," said Mrs. N——, as she raised Marie Louise's head, and laid her hand upon it, "you must have suffered much, ere the light of your soul could be so overclouded, and I am convinced that your own conscience has already punished you enough. I will not increase the burthen. I will not even ask you to give me a promise, for it might lead to your being tempted to the greatest sin that a human being can commit. But my Marie Louise in confiding in her mother has gained a victory over herself."

"Ah, yes! I feel that this is my best place of refuge. But nevertheless, dissuade me not from this marriage, but let us conclude all this evening. Believe me, believe me, dear mother, I shall be more calm when I have some definite object for which to live."

"In the name of God, then," said her mother, with a heart filled with anguish, "only one thing will I add, and preserve these words in your inmost soul: when you have once formed this engagement, which is to last for life, remember that not a thought or feeling must be untrue to him to whom you have given all."

* * * * * *

On the day after this important crisis in Marie Louise's life, the report of her betrothal spread through the town, and reached at last the house of the counsellor.

"Now we will see whether the bells do not ring another tune," said the old lady, as she went up stairs to the apartment of the engineer, whose dwelling was now increased by the addition of the parlor, since he had no less than three assistants, who worked at the different windows.

Mistress Utter was accustomed to call this room "the office," when she boasted to her acquaintances of the important business and profitable employment of her little engineer, whom she always considered as her own property.

Williamson sat in his old place in the bow-window, and was writing.

"Welcome, Aunt Gretchen," and he hastily cleared a chair for the old lady.

She carefully shut the door.

"Now, William, hast thou heard nothing new?"

"Nothing remarkable, except that Pellander, who was here just now, has come into the town to awaken justice from her slumbers."

"How so?"

"It is about a warrant to be served by the burgomaster, which has been too long delayed, because it was against his relation, the Lieutenant Walden."

"Surely not!"

"Yes, indeed. Pellander has now received full authority from the creditors to bring the affair to a speedy conclusion, and unless the lieutenant finds some means of leading our advocate into temptation, whose toleration and humanity are well known on such occasions, I suspect the lieutenant will have to leave the town in rather more inconvenient a manner than he is accustomed to travel."

"Oh, no danger of that. He will soon find means to bring his affairs into order. Hast thou heard nothing new besides?"

"No—what then?" asked Williamson, and his cheek assumed a deeper dye.

"Marie Louise was betrothed yesterday to Lieutenant Walden."

"Oh, that is scandalous!" cried Williamson, starting up.

"Scandalous! is not that saying too much?"

"Too much! no, certainly not. To be seeking a wife at the same moment that he is about to be imprisoned for debt! She must not be sacrificed. But who can warn her?"

"Hast thou any advantage in her being warned?"

"I think not of my own advantage or injury—I think only of her, before whom I see a bottomless abyss."

"But, my dear little William, this is not the worst thing that a man in his case can do."

"If it were not, he would have done something yet worse, the wretch——" Williamson broke off suddenly, and added more calmly—"But, by Heavens! she shall not rush into destruction unwarned. She may judge of me as she pleases—my behavior for a long while has shown that I do not act from self-interest. I will speak with her mother, and even with Marie Louise herself if it be necessary."

"But calm thyself, and reflect——"

"There is no time for reflection. I will go over to them this evening. Yet stay—I should certainly meet the lieutenant there. It must be done immediately, since he is probably in a hurry to settle his affairs as soon as possible. I will go this very moment."

Williamson dressed himself quickly; and scarcely half an hour elapsed after he received the intelligence, which, in spite of his resolutions, had shaken his inmost soul, ere he stood in the ante-room of the suite of apartments occupied by Marie Louise and her mother.

From the inner room Mrs. N—— heard his voice, and came immediately to receive him.

With the same feeling, not of confusion, but of reciprocal uneasiness, they met, and on her part this was not diminished when Williamson seated himself by her side on the sofa, and with a somewhat faltering voice, said—

"I come on an affair of great importance: will Mrs. N—— permit an old friend to speak without circumlocution?"

"Most willingly," stammered she. She trembled lest Williamson might be wishing to renew his proposals now, when it was too late. But she was soon convinced of her mistake, when Williamson, changing color, continued,—

"Miss Marie Louise was yesterday betrothed; may I ask if you are intimately acquainted with the individual who has received your daughter's consent?"

"No, God knows! not in the least."

"I imagined so; and although I should be the last to allude to these reports, yet my conscience will not permit me to see this engagement formed without giving you an opportunity of judging to what consequences it may lead."

"Speak on, speak on, my good Mr. Engineer."

"In the first place, Lieutenant Walden is not only ruined, but he is involved in a number of not very honorable affairs, which are principally the result of his passion for play. A proof of this at the present moment—and I trust you will not think me to blame for mentioning it—is that the burgomaster, from motives easy to guess without encroaching on truth, has delayed for a long time the issue of a writ which was to be served against him. This very day the attorney of the creditors is in the town, and in what manner the matter will be settled one can well imagine, now that Lieutenant Walden's new connection is known."

"Oh, my forebodings! my forebodings! I never thought well of the man."

"And yet," continued Williamson, "this, in my opinion, is the least part of the affair, since this is unfortunately by no means an unusual circumstance, and sooner or later must have reached your ears. But what I have to add, nothing but the importance of the occasion obliges me to reveal, since it has been told to me in confidence. Lieutenant Walden, scarcely a month ago, and at the same time that he was laying his fate in the hands of Miss Marie Louise, proposed for the plain but wealthy daughter of the Baroness G——. He was determined to save himself by one means or the other. If fortune were unfavorable to him here, it would, he thought, be more kind in the other direction. The baroness, who suspected that he had only the large property of her daughter in view, had not yet answered, but had decided on a refusal, and in the mean time Miss Marie Louise has given her consent."

"What a tale is this!" Mistress N—— blushed, and her voice trembled.

"It requires proofs," rejoined Williamson, "*which I have* here." He drew out of his *breast pocket a letter*, addressed to the Baroness G——, and signed Rudolph von Walden.

"In the name of Heaven, how came this in the hands of the engineer?"

"In the most simple manner. For some time I have been in correspondence with this lady, respecting the division of an estate between herself and a neighbor. I was so happy as to win her confidence, and before sending her answer to Lieutenant von Walden, she was pleased to confide to me this proposal, and begged me, as I lived in the same town with the lieutenant, to furnish her with some particulars respecting his character and his affairs, both of which seemed to her somewhat doubtful."

"And what answer did you give?"

"That I knew nothing of him, except that he had been for some time a suitor to your daughter; but that the result was yet unknown. By return of post the baroness sent me this letter, which proved his contemptible double-dealing, and charged me to send it back to the lieutenant in an empty cover, when he was in the company of your daughter. I ought to have executed this commission yesterday; but it can be done as well to-day, after it has, as I trust, thrown sufficient light upon Lieutenant von Walden's proceedings."

"Ah! my dear Engineer Williamson, this is, indeed, a convincing proof. And yet I fear——"

"How? Would your daughter under such circumstances—It is not possible!"

"Nothing is more difficult than to see beforehand how Marie Louise will take a matter, and least of all this. But if Mr. Engineer will oblige me still further, promise me to speak to her yourself."

"Not willingly, my good lady. It is too tender a point—in a word, your daughter would think—No; I must, indeed, beg that you will spare me."

"Say no more. Mr. Engineer, you shall not escape me. Have the goodness to remain, I hear Marie Louise in the next room. I will prepare her beforehand. Do not be impatient if we detain you some time," and she disappeared. The good woman thought that no one could influence Marie Louise so well as Williamson. We shall see whether she judged her daughter rightly. What passed in the other room has not reached our knowledge, since only broken words reached Williamson's ear as he stood leaning against the mantel-piece in the most painful state of mind. He almost repented having undertaken an affair which, whether it succeeded or not, might cast a shadow on himself. Who would trouble themselves about the purity of his motives, who believe that, should he succeed in overthrowing his rival, he would not wish to renew his former addresses? No one could really tell, but many, perhaps, would guess; indeed, Marie Louise herself might believe that selfish calculations had been the ground of his interference.

These considerations were inexpressibly bitter to Williamson; but now that the step was taken, he could not retreat, and whatever might arise out of it, he would always have a consolation in the consciousness that even at the risk of sacrificing her good opinion of him, he had endeavored to save her. She should not, at all events, run into danger blindfolded.

It seemed an eternity to Williamson, until the door was softly opened, and Marie Louise appeared on the threshold.

They had never been together alone since the important moment, when, through her unconquerable pride, she had discarded her lover. Again they stood face to face; he grave and deeply moved internally, she with calm dignity, without a trace of any clouds having passed over her brow.

Marie Louise was ever most undecided in character when a matter was in question about which she had to come to a resolution. Once having decided, however, she advanced determinately forwards, let her meet what hindrances she might. It followed from this that her betrothal, which had only taken place a few hours before, assumed in her eyes the sanctity of marriage, and she looked upon her own honor as involved in that of the man to whom she had united her fate, and who was to share her fortune. Had she thought otherwise—had she not considered a mere betrothal as so indissoluble an engagement, she would not, perhaps, in this painfully decisive moment, have rejected the man who then, now, and for ever, was worshipped by her in her inmost heart.

"Ever most welcome, Mr. Engineer," said she, in the tone of politeness with which one speaks to intimate acquaintances. "I cannot but be very grateful to you for the well-intentioned purpose that brings you here; but in addition to the explanation that mamma has given, another is necessary, which I beg to be allowed to make."

Williamson was as if he had fallen from the clouds. There stood this woman, who, as he knew for certain, still loved him, who would, he imagined, appear amid tears and violent emotion to thank him for his zeal, or to upbraid him, or if not, who would at least display in an interview with him a certain degree of fear and timid uneasiness—there she stood perfectly self-possessed, and spoke in the tone of a polite acquaintance, and as if he had come to make a most unimportant communication. Wholly perplexed by this presence of mind, of which he could himself boast still less and less, he stood, for want of an appropriate answer, in silent expectation of the explanation she announced.

"As to the first part of the story," said Marie Louise, with as much assurance as if it were the most perfect truth, "I must explain that it was already known to me—" she perceived with satisfaction Williamson's evident astonishment,—"that at the same time, or rather before Lieutenant von Walden sought my hand, he communicated to me the disorder in his pecuniary affairs, which circumstances, however, I did not consider as any hindrance to an engagement I had already decided on. As to this letter"—she laid it on the table before him—"I will not allow myself to remark on the misuse which has been made of it. I will only observe that I shall never allow Von Walden to know that I have seen it, since at the time it was written there was no engagement between us; therefore he was quite at liberty to propose for whom he pleased. And I suppose that he considered the delay in sending of an answer equivalent to a refusal, and a proof of his being at liberty to renew his proposals to me, which he did yesterday."

"From all this," rejoined Williamson, as he folded up the letter, "I perceive that I might have spared myself my trouble—but one is unfortunately seldom able to calculate beforehand the utility of such attempts. It is my duty to believe a lady's word, and at all events, her mode of action in this matter is worthy of all admiration. Nevertheless, Miss Marie Louise, do not leave these facts, which I have laid before you, without consideration—they speak for themselves, and permit me——"

"No, Mr. Engineer," interrupted Marie Louise; "I cannot allow that the person with whom I have united my destiny should be any longer the subject of such a conversation between us; and I must also say, that I do not consider that I have anything to do with what has passed before my betrothal with Lieutenant von Walden. That is his affair, not mine."

"And whatever may be considered to weigh against the character of the lieutenant, has no value in the eyes of his betrothed bride?"

"No value."

"Pardon me, young lady—but if I may be allowed to speak with sincerity, I would ask if this may not with propriety be called wilful blindness?"

"Possibly," answered Marie Louise; "but it is at the same time my principle."

The blood rushed to Williamson's head. His irritation had for some time struggled with a better feeling, a feeling that spoke warmly for Marie Louise, even when it was evident that she was willing to let herself be led into destruction. A sharp answer died on his lips, and, in a tone of inward mildness, he said: "I fear that this principle may be the cause of incalculable mischief in the future. Ah, Marie Louise," continued he, in greater emotion, "believe the friend who knows no higher interest than your happiness. He can have no bad motive. Consider it well, I conjure you, Marie Louise!"

"Not this tone, for God's sake! Leave me. We have nothing more to say to each other. Thanks, thanks for all; but it has come too late! and Marie Louise disappeared.

In the gloomiest temper of mind Williamson returned home. Marie Louise had despised his advice, his good will; she had, perhaps, suspected him of a deep plan, and seeing the turn which the affair had now taken, he repented that he had adopted this means to point out to her her danger.

CHAPTER XV.

What can my prayers avail me?—what my tears?
Stands not my sentence deeply now engraved
Indelibly on Fate's recording page?
Wherefore now efforts, hopes, desires, or fears?
What can I now attain, and what now lose?
RANEBERG.

Two hours after Williamson's visit, with radiant looks, Lieutenant Von Walden entered the apartment of his betrothed. He was happy, happier even than the day before, when he had received her assent, for this day he had received Pellander's assent, and the latter, for a respectable douceur, had prom*ised to persuade his* creditors that the debts would be much sooner paid by leaving the lieutenant in peace to get married, than by throwing him into prison.

"How are you to-day, my beloved Marie Louise?" asked the quickly alarmed lover, as he saw her, with cheeks as pale as marble, leaning back on a sofa.

"Not quite well, and considering the report that has been spread all over the town this morning, and therefore came even to my knowledge, I should not have expected to see you so cheerful."

Von Walden, uncertain what report she meant—for a thousand possibilities passed through his head—was too wise, however, to expose himself on any point that could be concealed. He looked, therefore, at his betrothed with an inquiring glance.

"The affair with the advocate Pellander."

"Ah! how provoking these little townspeople are. The whole place meddles with the affairs of individuals. I assure you, my love, this is quite a trifle, not worthy of your attention, and that is, besides, already arranged."

"By undertaking to settle your obligations in two months' time—do I guess right? It was, I think, just two months from this time that, at your urgent entreaty, I fixed for our marriage?"

Von Walden blushed deeply, yet answered, in the most fascinating manner: "Six weeks, my angel."

"Yes, so it was; but you would, at all events, require a couple of weeks to make yourself acquainted with your newly acquired possessions."

"You wish to offend me, dearest Marie Louise."

"Far from it; I only wish that we should understand each other rightly. Your circumstances are greatly involved, and nothing is more natural than that you should seek to bring them into order again."

"Ah, Marie Louise! My beloved, adored Marie Louise! You will not believe that from such a motive I have endeavored with such zeal to secure the happiness that you have at last conferred?"

"In the position in which we stand one to another," replied Marie Louise, "I think it is best that we should show each other always perfect confidence, and in order to make a beginning, I will openly speak my mind. I believe that this wish lay principally at the bottom of your calculations, but that you have at the same time sufficient personal inclination for me as will make the consciousness of being an opulent man all the more agreeable; in a word, I do not doubt but that in the case —I merely put a case—had you been able to secure the hand of a rich and ugly woman, you would have preferred me, if it depended on your own choice."

Von Walden stood literally petrified. Marie Louise must also know—what was to be done? Nothing else was left him than to follow the example of sincerity which she had set him. But he must use *finesse*, and not be too open.

The result of this reflection was, that Von Walden threw himself at the feet of his betrothed, and seizing her hand, stammered out: "Marie Louise, can you forgive me?—it happened in a moment of frenzy and despair, when I had lost all hope of possessing you. But I revoked the foolish step immediately.

"You?"

"Yes, upon my honor!"

"And if you had not done so, would you have accepted the hand of this heiress?"

"Would he," answered the lieutenant, with an insinuating voice, "who had conquered Marie Louise, have to fear a refusal from a little Medusa?"

"No, that is going too far!" said Marie Louise, in a tone that sounded very cutting in the ear of a betrothed lover. She was not cold, not excited; but she expressed something worse than either.

"What do you mean by that, my love?"

"That you must have a very short memory —yet let us leave this subject! You will always find me disposed to shut my ears to all that may reach my knowledge concerning your past life. But, mark well, in all that you may do in future I shall take a part! Should your honor be stained, so will also be mine—yet I trust that you will commit no actions at which I could have to blush."

"No, by Heaven! you more than mortal, ideal woman, with these elevated sentiments which so few of your sex possess! Believe me—I swear it faithfully—my whole life shall be consecrated to you and honor!—never will I have a secret from you; never commit an action that I must conceal from your pure eyes."

The lieutenant was in the clouds. He had fancied himself on the brink of an abyss, and through a miracle, he knew not how, he was restored to blessedness again.

"God grant," said Marie Louise, earnestly, "that you may keep this promise. As soon as we are *married, your hands* will be free, since, to bind you more securely, I am ready to bestow full confidence in you. Mamma has done all in her power to persuade me to consent to a settlement; but he to whom I give my hand must also be master of all that I possess. Should you abuse my confidence, then—but I will not think of anything so frightful."

"You will not, beloved Marie Louise, because you cannot think so contemptibly of the man whom you have chosen to be your husband. I take God to witness that I mean honorably, and that I acknowledge no higher study than to secure your happiness."

"That—" Marie Louise passed her hand across her brow—"yet no matter! Hear me now further: as I have told you, you are about to become master of all my property, therefore you must immediately set your affairs in order, so that we may be free from the remembrance of them; after that you must become regular, strictly regular in all your transactions, if you wish to win my esteem and preserve it, since poor will I never become again."

"Nor I neither," asserted Von Walden, most sincerely, from his heart. "I should long ago have become a most regular and steady man, if I had possessed something certain to live upon; but a poor man can only keep himself afloat through activity."

When this certainly not very sentimental conversation between the betrothed lovers was ended, Von Walden, with the privilege of a lover and betrothed husband, attempted to play a part which would suit better the connection which had been entered into four-and-twenty hours before, but this attempt was cut short immediately, by Marie Louise declaring that she hated all love-making. They could, she said, love each other quite as well without it, and she knew nothing more tiresome than two betrothed lovers billing and cooing like doves, and feeding on kisses."

"But the food is divine!" rejoined the lieutenant.

"For those who like it, perhaps—but to me it is almost nauseous."

"Heavens! how prosaic! What shall I do, then, with my heart glowing with love?"

"You have got rid of it, as you have given it to me," said she, with forced cheerfulness.

"Good; but unfortunately one cannot give it so completely away but what a part will be left which suffers for the rest."

"No, those are quite too fade remarks—

think of something more interesting by the time you come again. Now I have letters to write!" and Marie Louise dismissed very abruptly the future disposer of her fate.

The letter that she wished to write was to the Baroness Charlotte, whom she must make acquainted with the change that had taken place in her situation. But not one word did she speak of the discovery which had been made of the character of her betrothed, nor of her last interview with Williamson. Her communication, however, to her clear-sighted friend, revealed very plainly that at the moment it was written she was far from being as happy, or as much at ease, as she endeavored to represent.

The short period of freedom left to Marie Louise came soon to an end. The anxious loving mother sighed deeper and deeper as the important day approached; but Marie Louise had ever at hand a flattering caress, or a consolatory word. Never had she been so loving, so warm, so humble or attentive, as now. Yet nothing could appease the mother's anxious heart; it penetrated the veil that Marie Louise had cast over her inmost feelings, and it trembled to think that she might be wounded by the thorns with which she played.

During the three announcement days,* friends and acquaintances streamed into the house of Mrs. N——. Williamson paid a hasty visit one morning, in company with Counsellor Utter. Mistress Utter ought, of course, to have been at one of the great coffee parties, but as Von Walden would be present, and Williamson considered it too great a trial to his feelings, she declined going, with more readiness than, under other circumstances, she would have done.

On the 16th of February, the great house in the Market-place shone brilliantly with the light of chandeliers and candelabras. The uninvited part of the population of the town crowded, full of curiosity, around the house, to catch a sight of the bride, as she showed herself occasionally at the windows, now accompanied by her enraptured bridegroom, and now surrounded by her bridesmaids.

"She never looked so little pretty as this evening," said one of the more genteel of the class of ladies whom maidservants, in taking their messages, entitle 'Madame'—"her eyes are so swollen and red."

"Ah, but she is so elegant, so elegant!" cried another. "A bride's face is of no importance. Look at that flouncing—four rows of blond! And that stiff silk—how lucky she is! Oh that I were in her place!"

"She is not, perhaps, so very happy, after all," said a third. "I know Ma'mselle Henriette, and she said to me this morning, as I was there on business, that the young lady did not sleep the whole of last night, but was walking up and down her room, and that even to-day she is rather strange."

"Oh, that she always was, the haughty little thing!" said the fourth speaker. "She never knew rightly on what foot to stand, and it will be still worse now that she has a carriage to ride in. My husband has had the lining and stuffing of the elegant new carriage to do, and made the liveries of the two lacqueys that are running about here and there."

As this was going on, there sat in the gloomy twilight a person leaning over the little table that stood in the bow-window. It was Williamson, who had put on his uniform with the intention of making one of the wedding guests; but when the time had come for going, he had lost all power to move from the spot. Motionless he sat, with his eyes fixed on the opposite bow-window: it looked as gloomy and desolate as the grave!

What can my prayers avail me? what my tears?
Wherefore now efforts, hopes, desire, or fears?
What can I now attain, and what now lose?

The counsellor had already gone to the wedding; but Mistress Utter, who would not afford herself a new black silk dress for an occasion which caused her so much grief, had remained at home. She knew that Williamson intended to go, and as all was still in his room she concluded that he had set off; and, taking a light, tripped up the stairs to his room, in order to set it a little to rights. In the outer room, the two young assistants were gossiping over their writing tables; they also concluded that their master had gone out. But, Heavens! how startled was Aunt Gretchen as she entered, and saw him whom she believed to be among the wedding guests seated as motionless as death at the table. In a second she reached him, and seizing him by the arm—"William! William! my dear young man! What is the matter with thee? Look at me, then!"

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* In Sweden, Germany, etc., after a betrothal, cards are sent out, and visits formally paid and received. The connection is thus considered of a much more binding nature than a mere engagement in England. It is rare that any circumstances occur to separate a *betrothed couple*, and the engagement cannot be *broken up without considerable* odium being reflected *on the lady.*

"Yes, yes," said William, as he wiped the cold sweat from his brow, "I ought to be at Marie Louise's wedding, ought I not?"

"But it is now too late, dear child," said the old lady, with suppressed tears, for never had she seen her dear William in the state he now seemed. He was so pale, that there seemed to be scarcely a drop of blood flowing in his veins.

"No, not too late, dear aunt! I will, I must see her as a bride!"

"Nay, my dear, that must thou not think of! She has cost thee enough already; and people would laugh were they to see thee as thou lookest now—people, I mean, who do not know better."

"What! you think that I should be laughed at?"

"Yes, yes; it might so happen. But see now, my dear little William, here is some one who will not laugh at thee, and who would willingly give the rest of her old life if she could purchase back the happiness that thou hast lost. Come, now, and sit thee down by the old woman's side on the sofa, and let her talk a little with thee."

"Oh, no! I cannot talk! It is so close here—there is no air. I must go out a little."

"No, that thou shalt not. We will take off this tight coat,—that oppresses thee, without anything else. See, dear William, here is thy loose frock-coat. When we feel ourselves quite at home, we are more comfortable."

The old lady induced him to take off his wedding dress, which she laid again in the wardrobe, that it might not awaken painful recollections, and with especial care she hid the sword, of which, in her excited imagination, she had great fear. Now sat Williamson on the sofa, at the side of his best and truest friend, and let her speak, do, and behave as she would, whilst, still absorbed in thought, he gazed on the opposite house.

"Alas, alas! thou hearest me not!" exclaimed the old lady, and pressed his hand.

"I will listen to all this afterwards," said he. "Let me only throw my cloak round me. I must go out. I have made up my mind to see her this evening."

"Well, then, go, in God's name! But let me *go with thee*—we can disguise ourselves a little, and mingle in the crowd of common people."

Williamson sprang up eagerly: "Thanks, hearty thanks!" said he. "Let us make haste."

"Yes, take thy cloak and hat, and wait patiently a little while down stairs whilst I dress. But, my dear William, in return for going with you, must you promise me faithfully and truly, that we shall turn back again directly you have seen her."

"Yes; I desire no more."

And arm-in-arm went the old woman and the young man to the Market-place. No one showed that they knew them, but from the readiness with which room was made for them as they passed through the crowd, Mistress Utter felt sure that they were recognized. A short distance from the house, she stopped. Draw thine hat down over thine eyes, and pull up thy collar," whispered she.

Williamson heard her not, for his wish was already fulfilled. Followed by her bridesmaids, with lights in their hands, the bride appeared at the window, as if brought by a secret warning.* She looked down into the street upon the dark mass of human beings, among which no individual form could be recognized, but the influence of a foreboding was perhaps upon her heart, for this time, as when she had showed herself before, she could not smile. Her lips trembled as she bowed low and gravely. After a few minutes, she disappeared from the window.

"Shall we go now?" whispered Mistress Utter, and pulled Williamson gently by the arm.

"Yes."

And in the little sitting-room of his hostess, where he had passed so many cheerful and happy hours, sat Williamson, the whole evening, extremely calm. Indeed, he was so unexpectedly resigned, that the old lady feared for him. But later in the evening the restraint which he had put upon himself was thrown off. Pacing up and down the room with his hands pressed over his eyes, Aunt Gretchen could see the tears streaming through his fingers.

After this relief, his power over himself returned, and his old friend could have wept herself tears of joy at seeing her dear little engineer himself again if she could have ventured to acknowledge that she had seen the struggle.

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* In Sweden, a bride shows herself in this manner to her neighbors on her wedding day.

"Thanks, thanks, dearest Aunt Gretchen!—this is all that I can say," said Williamson, as they parted on this bitter and trying night. "My own mother could not have been more to me at such a moment."

"Do not make the old woman too proud. She acted only from selfishness: thy happiness is also hers."

"But without this noble selfishness," said Williamson, as he embraced her with emotion, "I should not have been now what I am, and," added he, for he suspected that she had seen his weakness, "God gave woman tears with which to vent her grief, but to man, with whom they are strange guests, they help him to recover strength and courage."

Praising God went old Mistress Utter to rest, and slept long and well, whilst Williamson, in silent sorrow, lay looking across at Marie Louise's window, on whose frosted panes the moon shone so brightly. And, raised above all trivial thoughts, he prayed for her and for himself!

CHAPTER XVI.

How memorable was the hour—
Full of light, from thousand suns—
Full of bliss and harmony!
VON BRAUN.

Yes—are we not indeed happy?
MELLIN.

It was eight days after the wedding.

Marie Louise reclined on a sofa in her boudoir, wrapped in an elegant morning dress. Her hand held a book, whilst her eyes rested, not without a certain degree of satisfaction, on the handsome form of her husband, who, seated on a stool at her feet, struck the strings of a guitar, and accompanied its feeble sounds with a voice neither weak nor feminine, but which had a right manly tone.

"My lady's carriage is at the door," announced a servant in the livery of the Von Walden family.

Marie Louise replied to the intelligence by a slight bend of her head; but when her husband had ended the song he was singing, she said, in a friendly tone, "I will not ask you to accompany me to-day! Now and then it *is as well to take the* air alone."

"*As you will*, my angel. It is a sacrifice which you impose on me." Walden kissed his wife's hand politely: "But it is to be hoped the sun will not disappear for a long time?"

"Ah, my good Walden, if you would only lay aside those worn-out and trivial phrases, which really mean nothing! Shall we pay some visits this evening?"

"Certainly, if you think it right, my beloved! As these well-meaning people are determined to interrupt our domestic bliss with their invitations, I suppose we should, as a compensation for their trouble, bestow a short visit on them."

"Yes, so I think also."

"And ever thus, my adored Marie Louise, will our opinions agree on every subject! Harmony is the foundation of all wedded bliss!"

"That is true, my friend! But now I must dress. May I beg of you to ring the bell?"

"Ring? what are you thinking of, my divine one? I shall make a point of waiting on you myself. You only require your cloak and shawl, and I allow no one to fasten your shoes but myself—and see, everything is lying ready in your bed-chamber," and with cheerful alacrity, the newly married husband busied himself around his bride with more devotion than a lover.

"Well, then, as you will have it so!" and Marie Louise stretched out her foot on a footstool.

"Ah, what an exquisite foot. I defy Venus herself to show one equal to it."

"I entreat you, in the name of Heaven, my friend," said Marie Louise, impatiently, "to leave off such a bombastic manner of speaking. The horses have, besides, waited so long, and the coachman must be half frozen."

"What does that matter, my goddess! Horses and coachmen are made to wait. Now, where is your fur? What a tasteful dress—how well it sits. Nothing becomes you so well as blue, excepting pink——"

"And yellow, and white, I suppose?" added Marie Louise.

"Yes, of course; for everything becomes you. But this little violet-colored velvet bonnet beats everything. One can see plainly that the dahlia in it is a true Parisian. You ought to let me go with you to enjoy the admiration that you will excite."

"This last remark drew a smile from Marie Louise, for from the windows she knew there would be many a look cast on her; but to her husband, she said: "Do you think that I am so vain as that such a little motive should make me change my wish to go alone?" an intimation which Walden, as a polite man, did not oppose.

Meanwhile he followed his young wife to the carriage, put down the steps, and presented his hand to assist her in.

A foot-passenger passed at this moment, and bowed.

"Good God! I really do believe you are trembling, my angel; are you ill?"

"No, I was only afraid of the impatience of the horses. Adieu! adieu! I shall soon return." She seated herself erect in the carriage, and Von Walden closed the door after he had pressed a light kiss on the hand of his bride.

"Where does my lady wish me to drive to?" asked the coachman.

"To the east gate."

The carriage flew on. Marie Louise greeted her husband again, and would then have sunk into a corner of the carriage, and yielded herself up to her concealed emotions, had she not remarked that attention was directed to her from every window as she drove past. She was supported by the fear of observation. Full of graciousness, and without any of the signs of pride, of which she was usually accused, she greeted courteously all her friends and acquaintances. But as she drove past her former dwelling, and saw the frosted windows, and thought on the past and the present, then feeling asserted its dominion. Fortunately, she was soon through the street and out on the high road, where, in undisturbed solitude, she sunk back in the carriage, and gave herself up to the reflections and emotions which crowded into her mind.

"No; I must away from here," was her only clear thought. "This exceeds all human efforts. No duty, however holy it may be, can deliver us from the power of imagination, which ever returns to the same objects."

In despair, half in a kind of delirium, had Marie Louise resolved on her marrige. She wished to adopt a powerful means of tearing the passion from her breast which disturbed her peace. For this to succeed, she must not be for ever under the eyes of him whose very name revived it. Marie Louise, now that this marriage was accomplished, had formed a strong and determined resolution that she would, as a sort of atonement for her former folly, *perform to her utmost* the duties of the state she had entered. She felt no antipathy to Von Walden, but at the same time no particular liking. He was good-natured, cheerful, and attentive; and, in a word, he was agreeable.

"Alas! yes; he is agreeable enough," sighed Marie Louise, for it presented itself to her mind, how modest she was in her requirements, since she was not able to bestow her heart upon him. This, Von Walden also knew in secret; but he easily comforted himself over it, provided only that she showed him friendliness.

After eight days more, which were passed in all kinds of feasting and entertainments, Marie Louise said one evening to her husband, "I am so fond of seeing spring coming on from the very beginning, that, if you have no objection, let us remove to Malcolm's-Ness?"

"This is a sudden and quite unexpected resolution, my angel."

"Ah! yes, I confess it—but so it is. I have my little whims. Have you not remarked that."

"No, indeed, I have not."

"Well, then, my friend," continued Marie Louise in an insinuating tone, "it is not too soon, if you discover it after a fortnight's marriage! I have a most intense desire to see Malcolm's-Ness just now."

"But my affairs, which I ought to be arranging at this time?"

"You could arrange them far better out in the country, where you will be quite undisturbed. And you are quite sure that your creditors, either in person or by letter, will find you out wherever you are."

"That is true—but the country at this season! If you want to travel, why should we not undertake a longer journey, more suited to a newly-married pair? We could not enter upon the gaieties of Stockholm at a better time. Oh! what a triumph it would be for me to introduce such a bride there! You smile, my beloved, and I perceive that you are not quite indifferent to all the admiration that you must receive wherever you go."

"No, you are deceived, my good Walden. I was not smiling at that. The sort of happiness that you picture to me, and which is not without its attractions for a woman, I can enjoy another winter. But I have so often heard you enlarge upon the heavenly bliss of the so-called honeymoon, that I did not expect you would be ready so soon to exchange heaven for the earth. Besides, I remember, on the contrary, that all newly-married couples go into the country to enjoy in solitude the delight of each other's society undisturbed. Only after some considerable time do they begin to draw a circle of friends around them, and seek the pleasures of society."

With a half ironical, half coquettish smile, the young wife spoke these words, which, contrary to her usual custom, were followed by a slight caress.

"Both now and forever must it be as you wish, you irresistible one!" answered he. "But one thing I must beg, which is, that you will not take it ill if I were to invite a couple of fellows, good old friends of mine, who, with their agreeable society, will increase our domestic enjoyment."

"Such invitations for any length of time," said Marie Louise, "are not quite in accordance with my taste, but—"

"But in all country-houses *comme il faut*, they are the custom, my treasure. When one leaves town, one invites friends to come to one. That you will find," continued he, laughing, "in all first-rate English novels as well as Swedish, and even in real life."

"Against such decisive evidence I know not what to offer. Invite, then, whom you please; but visits in the neighborhood we need not pay so soon. I am tired of these eternal parties, and am determined to be quiet."

"Superb, my angel! People shall admire our devotion to each other, which only requires a hermitage to complete our happiness; and they will say: 'The new proprietors of Malcolm's-Ness are expected everywhere and they let their neighbors expect. They certainly are determined to carry it with a high hand.'"

Some days after this conversation the young couple removed to Malcolm's-Ness. Mrs. N—— did not accompany them; she declined, on the grounds that she preferred living in the town.

Marie Louise had not seen Williamson since her marriage, except on the morning of her first ride. He had not gone to any of the entertainments which had followed the wedding.

More, even, than the visiting of the town, did the journey into the country afford the newly-married pair opportunities of becoming acquainted with their mutual habits and peculiarities, so as to convince them that they were not the most interesting company to *each other. Yet each* did what they could *on their own part to* convince themselves of the contrary. He related anecdotes of his youthful days—anecdotes of drawing-room and barrack adventures. She listened, smiled, gaped rather frequently, and in return related particulars of the dear Segerstad, and her regrets that its possessors should be away, and pictured the pleasure which their return in the spring would afford. All this was very well; but it allowed the travellers time now and then to sleep, or at least to pretend that they did.

At last they reached home. But after the effort which they had made on the road, there was something cold in the manner and way of their entering on their solitude during this portion of the honeymoon.

The first week Von Walden employed in arranging his affairs; that is to say, what was absolutely necessary; for in spite of his promise to Marie Louise, either through old habit, or because the passing of money through his hands was too enticing, he discharged only such claims as were the most pressing. All those which could be possibly left unpaid he allowed to stand over. "For," said he to himself, "rich or poor, it is easy enough to find old debts without seeking them out oneself." Besides this, a number of useful things were now wanting; such as riding horses, hounds, and an improved condition of the cellar; and, moreover, various unavoidable alterations in the arrangements of the rooms and the furniture left by the deceased cousin Malcolm.

Whilst her husband was busy with these important concerns, Marie Louise was occupied in arranging her large household, hiring cook, and housekeeper, and maids of every description. She was determined herself to keep a watchful eye on all. Accustomed to habits of industry, occupation was at this time doubly welcome, as a diversion to her thoughts, and she soon began to take actual pleasure in her vocation as housewife.

In the evening the young couple usually met at the tea-table.

"You are working yourself to death, my dear Marie Louise," said, on one of these occasions, the yet attentive husband. "Let the servants do all these things."

"The servants require superintendence, which they have been so long without," answered the young wife. "I am mistress of the house now, and I will play my part well."

"And I am master of the house, my love," said Von Walden, laughing. "But the d—l take me—excuse me, that was an accidental reminiscence of my bachelor life—if I am able to perform my part with half the dignity which you put on in yours. Upon my honor, you are quite a charming Ma'mselle Rylander, when, with your little polka jacket, and handkerchief over your head, you go into the kitchen and pantry, and everywhere bring about such diligence, and such a spirit of order, as makes me downright mad if by chance I put my nose in."

"Be so good as to place the fire-screen here, my friend," was Marie Louise's answer to this domestic raillery. But for the first time it occurred to the lieutenant that it was not quite becoming in a wife to cool down, with a couple of indifferent words, his witty efforts to be entertaining. To point this out, he determined to play the husband, and said to the servant who was entering: "Your mistress wishes to have the screen nearer the fireplace; do not forget to attend to this another time."

To Walden's vexation, Marie Louise pretended not to observe his delicate hint. On the contrary, she took advantage of the presence of the servant to give him another commission.

When the master and mistress were alone, Von Walden, fearful that his assumed dignity should not have produced the desired effect, said: "You are not offended, I hope, my dear Marie Louise?"

"About what?" asked she, negligently.

"That I gave the servant your command."

"No, certainly. He had nothing else to do."

"What a heavenly Satan!" thought the lieutenant; but as he did not wish her to observe his disappointed hope of annoying her, and getting materials for a little retort, he said, cheerfully, "The evenings in our hermitage are rather long; would you not like to learn some game to play with me?"

"Why not?" answered Marie Louise. "Chess I know already, if you would like to play it."

"Ah, no! That is so wearisome, and requires—but the dogs are barking—perhaps——" and Von Walden went to the window to listen.

"Perhaps you are so fortunate as to have a partner for your game just at the right moment."

"Positively, my angel, I do believe it is my two friends! They are come, upon my honor! They are come as if sent by Providence!"

Von Walden had guessed rightly; the travellers were the expected intimate friends, who, after they had set their dress a little to rights, entered, led by their host, who introduced them as Major A—— and Captain G——. At the beginning of her acquaintanceship with these gentlemen, Marie Louise found this interruption to their solitude not unpleasant. It afforded a little change, which it must be confessed was already desirable.

To the amusements now entered upon was added that of horse riding. Marie Louise was soon persuaded to learn this delightful art, and charmed her husband by the readiness to which she consented to the proposal; and Von Walden gained through it a little business to transact, in sending for materials and tailor from the town to furnish the lady with a riding-dress.

Whilst waiting for this, the days were filled up with lively talk, reading, and music. The evenings, however, were devoted only to one amusement—namely, card-playing, which strange enough, neither of the gentlemen, although perfectly polite cavaliers, declined, out of consideration to their hostess. It is true that, twice, Von Walden endeavored to persuade Marie Louise, in joke, to take a hand at their game, but, as he expected, she had declined. She, however, like a good wife, took her work, and placed herself at her husband's side, which was rather more than he either wished or expected. This custom had the effect of preventing their play from extending beyond the time usually observed in society; and when the gentlemen showed any inclination to lengthen it out longer, Marie Louise would say, with engaging playfulness, "Gentlemen, you forget that I am only a spectator, and that a spectator has the failing of becoming weary."

In the mean time, the riding-habit was prepared, and on the first occasion that Marie Louise appeared in it, Von Walden could not abstain from admiring the figure and grace of his wife, which he thought he had never seen to such advantage before. The major and captain disputed for the honor of holding her stirrup, but were set aside by the jealous anxiety of the husband, who himself lifted his wife into her saddle. This did not escape the attention of Marie Louise. It pleased her more than anything she had seen in her husband. The ride was pleasant. She was teachable, attentive, and pleased; and all returned home in high spirits.

Every day was this pleasure renewed, and soon it became so favorite a diversion with

Marie Louise, that she was vexed when the sky threatened rain. The pleasure soon became a passion, and she would even ride out alone, when, in despair at her absence, the gentlemen would sit down at cards in broad daylight, to shorten the time, which, however, disappeared as regularly on her return.

"My good Walden," said Marie Louise one evening when she was alone with her husband, and with more than usual kindness in her tone, "I have remarked that you are unlucky at cards, and although the stakes are not high, yet, altogether, you must be a considerable loser."

"Which I make amends for on other evenings."

"That has happened very seldom. If you will only do me a pleasure, a real pleasure, you will not so constantly make cards your evening's amusement; not only for the cause I have mentioned, but because it is so *ennuying* for me to have to sit by the whole evening gaping over my work."

"Have you not brought this *ennui* upon yourself, my dear? Why should we not pay some visits to our neighbors, and invite them in return? Then you would have some change in your amusements, and you would have a circle to preside over, as becomes a lady of your rank and beauty."

"I am sorry that you should not only evade my remarks, but the few attentions that I require from you."

"Now, my angel, you cannot well complain of our guests, who are ready to lie down in the dust at your feet! But when one has been paying attentions the whole day——"

"One must dispense with them when the hour for card-playing comes, do you mean? But, my good Walden, in this we think very differently, and I will therefore, with all the frankness and openness that we agreed on at the beginning of our engagement, confess to you that I shall be seriously angry, if, now that I have requested it, you do not put some restraint on yourself, and diminish this practice, which I cannot think right when it becomes such a constant habit."

"You ought not to say this, Marie Louise; a wife ought to think—"

"That she is her husband's best friend, and that he ought to listen to her advice, when it proceeds from good motives," said she, interrupting her husband good humoredly.

"*Well, well, that is* not my opinion; but *as you have adopted it*, then—the card-table shall not make its appearance to-morrow!"

"Oh, you are a perfect model of an amiable husband!"

And Von Walden was pleased to surrender his marital authority to one of those fascinating smiles from his beautiful wife, which were all the more dangerous from being so rare. "But," thought he, "it is quite time now to put an end to the retirement of the honeymoon; it has lasted already five weeks—which is one week too long."

CHAPTER XVII.

I will no more on tip-toe stand;
As God has given me eyes,
So will I with them see.
VON BRAUN.

On the day after this conversation, the master and mistress of Malcolm's-Ness paid their first visit.

Marie Louise's toilette was calculated to elicit great admiration. Her appearance, which, when she chose, had the most distinguished elegance and the most refined grace, produced great effect on this her first brilliant display. What was the applause of the little townspeople compared to this aristocratic society? The admiration that she gained was, however, the least part of her satisfaction; for even more flattering was the marked politeness and kindness with which she was everywhere received. Marie Louise felt herself happy, for her vanity had gained a triumph which contented her.

On their return, having exhausted their remarks on the little events of the day, the gentlemen, as if attracted by an invisible power, began to hover round the beloved card-tables, which no officious servant came to arrange; for the mistress of the house had said to Landstedt, the butler, as he was about to perform his accustomed office, "We shall not play this evening."

To make amends, Marie Louise exerted her whole amount of conversational talent. The major and the captain listened with due politeness, and contributed their part in the conversation, although, as usual, only half awake, but Von Walden appeared quite inanimate and depressed.

Now that he had again begun to indulge in his most favorite amusement, or rather his only passion, it was quite impossible to limit it; especially as the thought occurred to him, how contemptible it was to follow the dictates of a wife. Was he not a man—had he not been long enough a slave? What would his two friends think of it? What would Marie Louise herself fancy when she saw that her power could be established so quickly and so easily, and without resistance? Without doubt, nothing less than that, as he had shown himself to be a *cipher*, she must perform the part of the *figure* through which the *cipher* represented a *number*. But this was not to be borne. Every manly feeling rose up against so much weakness. And yet it was not easy to brave Marie Louise so openly, as in his presence, and in consequence of his permission, she had told the servant that the table would not be wanted.

Von Walden was on the whole of a tolerably passive nature, but when his blood once began to ferment it ran rather quicker than he wished. A whole hour he struggled against the temptation; but as this temptation assailed him in the form of card-playing it was not to be overcome.

It was quite unknown to Marie Louise that the greater part of his debts had been occasioned by this dangerous passion, and even Von Walden himself was not aware how many promissory notes he had given during his nights of play. Many, he thought, could be paid without hesitation, many could wait, and many of considerable amount he had entirely forgotten, having been obliged during his long courtship to confine himself to the moderate card-playing of the little town. Even here at home in his own house, he was obliged to satisfy himself with low stakes, but still they were good players with whom he played, and were as eager and as excited over their game as himself.

It struck eight o'clock. What, in the name of Heaven, should they do with themselves until eleven, the hour when they were accustomed to retire for the night?

Marie Louise endeavored to draw Von Walden into conversation. Never had she been more friendly in her manner to him—but all was in vain! Perhaps he saw in it only a proof, that she herself suspected that she had carried her power too far. In short: Von Walden, after for a few minutes walking restlessly up and down the room, succeeded in quieting the rebellious feeling which forbade him to offend his wife in this manner. He rang, and ordered the servant, with a sharp voice, to set out the card-table. At the moment this command issued from his lips, a deep blush overspread Marie Louise's face. The proud wife, for the first time, set at defiance by the person whom she had made her husband, and whom she had invested with such unlimited power, stood up and approached Von Walden with a manner so quiet and gracious, that he was at a loss to account for it. "Now then," said she, with cheerful naïveté, as she gave him a slight blow with her handkerchief, "you have lost the wager, and I shall have great pleasure in wearing my new shawl—I was sure that you could not do without your card-table."

"Nothing could turn out better," thought Von Walden; and in the best possible humor at this turn given to the affair, he kissed his wife's hand with delight, and exclaimed: "Two shawls, my goddess, is the very least fine you can demand. Is not that right, gentlemen, when one loses a wager to such a charming wife as mine?"

Both gentlemen had very naturally suitable answers in readiness, but neither of them believed the story of the wager. On the contrary, they suspected the truth, and appreciated the delicacy and penetration of their young hostess so highly, that they would have condemned Von Walden for calling out these qualities in such a manner—had not their own passion for play enlisted them on his side.

Marie Louise took up her work, and placed herself as usual by the side of her husband. Once or twice Von Walden endeavored to persuade her to go to rest, as the day's visit had fatigued her, but she declined, and the play ended at the usual time.

* * * * *

"Does my lady want anything more?" asked the lady's maid.

"Nothing, Hannah."

The maid shut the bed-room door and left her mistress alone.

Marie Louise had thrown a shawl over her dressing-gown, and sat before the glimmering fire. She was busy unbraiding her beautiful hair, whilst Von Walden, quite subdued at the thought of his first curtain lecture, which was evidently approaching, walked slowly up and down the room.

But minute after minute passed. The tresses were all unbraided, and yet no beginning was made.

"What is she waiting for then?" thought

he; "perhaps for sighs and tears, and fallings on my knees and repentance—but nothing of that sort will she get, I can tell her! I may as well then break the ice myself——"

"Don't you feel quite well, dear Marie Louise?"

"Perfectly well."

"You are so silent, my angel?"

"I was thinking about something."

"About what? About your new shawls?" said he, wantonly joking over the improvised wager.

Marie Louise answered nothing.

"And about something else—our visit of to-day, perhaps? Yes, how formal everything is at old Lindholm; the old countess has advanced so little with the times, that she fancies a coronet is all that is needed to cover all deficiencies of her old house. But still she is a worthy well-bred old woman, whose presence inspires too much reverence for you young women to venture on all the display of coquetry in her presence that you are accustomed to."

Marie Louise still preserved silence.

"But at Kronby we shall certainly have a very pleasant party. The baroness is decidedly the prettiest woman we have in the neighborhood—of course, excepting the little mistress of Malcolm's-Ness."

Continued silence.

"Come now, my treasure, this is rather too interesting! Better let the storm burst than to be constantly threatening with dark clouds! I have heard that matrimonial blessedness has certain privileges connected with it, which are known under the name of curtain lectures, and I, poor wretch, must, I suppose, subject myself to the old law. Let the process, then, be as short as possible!" Von Walden took a chair, and sat down by the side of his wife.

"You might have spared yourself this joke, as you have perhaps seen yourself that it is out of place. I have no intention of requiring your attention to anything I have to say."

"Really, my little charmer, you will not be angry?"

"Angry!"

"Well, offended; displeased, if you will—in a word, you have perhaps cause enough, in seeing that a promise which you exacted from me yesterday was not to be depended upon."

"Yes, that I perceive."

"And in your capacity of angel—you know *I am so fond of assigning* this name to you—*you are not angry?*"

"In the capacity of an angel, in case I were one, I ought, perhaps, in seeing my inability to influence you, to weep. In the capacity of a woman, I am silent."

"And why so; wherefore be silent? I should like to know what grounds you can have for not saying something?"

"Words spoken in earnest," replied Marie Louise, "ought never to be thrown away in vain. What I have said was said in vain."

"Yes; but my dearest creature, you ought not to consider me quite lost, because I was bold enough for once to have my own way. Down in the drawing-room, coquetting with your pretended wager, you were so charming—why should you now look so gloomy about it?"

"Smiles and feigned words one has for strangers; for one's husband ——"

"One has looks of displeasure and unfriendly words?"

"No, not that—but one does not dissemble. And now we will consider that enough has been said about the matter."

"With the greatest pleasure, my dear Marie Louise—I have no other wish! But as you are so, so—how shall I say?—so totally different from what I had expected (Walden seized his wife's hand, and kissed it respectfully), I beg your pardon from my very heart. I see for the first time what the command you have over yourself must cost you."

"Since you say that, I will also confess that this effort to command myself almost exceeded my powers, and I should be very unhappy were you often to put me to such a trial."

"Ah, Marie Louise, my adored one! I am not worthy of thy goodness and forbearance!" And in a transport of repentance, and seized with momentary rapture, that she who could have said so much, had said so little, the husband threw himself at the feet of his wife. Marie Louise smiled: a sweet, good-humored, and yet troubled smile. Never had the married pair so firmly resolved as now to live for their duties and for each other; indeed, it was, perhaps, the first time that a true and earnest feeling had been awakened in Walden's frivolous mind.

Unfortunately all his impressions were of the most fugitive and transitory nature. It belonged to the present, however, to produce a most wonderful effect. On the following evening, Marie Louise thought of nothing less than a surprise, but she received one when

Von Walden, as Landstedt prepared, as usual, to arrange the card-table, said rather loudly, and as if the words required an effort: "No card-playing this evening!"

In the first quarter of an hour after the great surprise, Marie Louise's beautiful and speaking looks were a sufficient reward; but ere half an hour had elapsed, he began to repent of having carried out his generosity to such lengths. The satisfaction which he had had all day in the anticipation of Marie Louise's extraordinary astonishment, was now dissipated and gone; and his mind was soon possessed with a dark suggestion of how becoming and noble it would be, if Marie Louise on her side were to give a contrary command; it would be such an angelic action! But Marie Louise gave no such command, although, to tell the truth, she understood perfectly well her husband's wish; such a measure did not suit her character. "Hem, hem!" thought Von Walden, as he saw that his wish was not going to be fulfilled; "this is all very well for once."

On the following evening the card-table was again in use.

CHAPTER XVIII.

Soon was another kind of life and other doings in Malcolm's-Ness. Guests came and went. Invitations were given and received. The family at Segerstad had returned, and the ladies were constantly together.

The Baroness Charlotte, who had previously never had a taste for riding, would now accompany Marie Louise; and followed by the young cavaliers, whom the spring brought out to the country houses, especially to Segerstad, the ladies made long excursions, and it became the fashion to arrange little riding parties, to visit many points in the surrounding district, which had not hitherto excited attention, but which had now become suddenly interesting.

In this whirl of pleasure and dissipation, in which nothing was spared that could make time fly quickly, Marie Louise became less harassed by her inward reflections and feelings. She felt them still now and for ever, for her heart was not capable of having nourished them without preserving them for ever, but the healing remedy was not nauseous.

One *day the company*, with Marie Louise and the Baroness Charlotte at their head, engrossed by a lively conversation, had quite forgotten how far they had proceeded, when the baroness exclaimed,—

"What is that?—we have rode as far as Guillingen!"

"Do not be alarmed, ladies," said Von Walden; "this wood looks so venerable, we can cool ourselves a little under its shade. How picturesque is the sun shining through the branches of the trees!"

"I hear voices out there. What do you think, Madame von Walden, can wood nymphs have enticed us into the gloomy shade?" asked the major of his young hostess, who, silent and in deep thought, was looking up a footpath.

"No; on my honor, they are only two woodsmen. But, ha! what is that?"

The major drew up his horse, at the same moment with Marie Louise,—"You are frightened, I fear, my dear lady?"

"Frightened? No, not at all!" rejoined Marie Louise, whilst her cheeks assumed an unusual depth of color. Scarcely could she sit still in her saddle, so startled was she to her inmost soul by the voice which reached her ear.

The polite guest looked as if he were about to make another remark, but Marie Louise, seized by fear lest her emotion should be observed by the rest of the company, stammered out in a tone which sounded almost like a request: "It is only the heat, major—pay no attention to such a trifle." It was fortunate for Marie Louise that the attention of the Baroness Charlotte was directed another way; meanwhile she could scarcely master her uneasiness, since every instant she expected and dreaded to see the speaker.

She had not long to wait.

Two men, an old peasant and a young and handsome gentleman, in a light hunting jacket and round straw hat on his head, came out from the wood-path on to the road.

"Ah, your obedient servant, Mr. Engineer Williamson," cried Von Walden, with a loud voice. The husband was anxious to convince the baroness, and those of the company who might be acquainted with the past history of Marie Louise, that he was far from feeling either jealous or suspicious of the influence that his former rival might have, and he rejoiced, on the contrary, that he had an opportunity of showing off to him his wife and his happiness.

"Your most obedient servant. This is a most agreeable rencontre; is it not, my dear Marie Louise?"

"Extremely agreeable," said she, catching at the first phrase that came to her lips.

Williamson, meantime, greeted the company right and left, and stepping up to her horse, with a self-possession that restored her own speech and courage, and whilst he patted the animal's neck, said cheerfully, but in a perfectly well-measured tone: "I almost fancy I see Diana herself, with her followers; but it would not have given me greater pleasure to meet the goddess herself in *propria persona*. It is quite unnecessary to ask after the health of Madame von Walden, seeing how well she looks."

"One can see, too," rejoined Von Walden, "how polite the gentlemen from the town are. I ought not to agree with you; but as we are not long out of our honeymoon, I may venture to say that I also think the air of the country has greatly embellished my wife."

Williamson did not gratify Von Walden by appearing to notice this affectation of frankness. "I am detaining the ladies, I fear," said he, and prepared to make his retreat.

"We are not in such a hurry," answered Marie Louise, who began to feel that her silence towards an old acquaintance would appear strange. "I must have the honor of introducing to Engineer Williamson a friend, of whom I have so often spoken to him."

A deep bow on Williamson's side, followed by a few off-hand words of politeness, was returned by a most gracious inclination of the Baroness Charlotte's beautiful head. She had never imagined that this long-disliked Engineer Williamson was so good looking, or that in the quality of a former lover of Marie Louise he would have shown so much tact and good breeding.

"Give us your company to Malcolm's-Ness," said Von Walden, in the tone of the frankest hospitality. The idea of showing off his whole power in his own home to the engineer charmed his frivolous mind. Blushing deeply, Marie Louise saw herself obliged, in the presence of bystanders, to unite her entreaties to those of her husband.

Williamson declared that to his great regret he was unable to avail himself of their kindness. "Pressing business," etc.

Oh, there is not always that in the way. *We are neighbors, too,* as long as the engineer *has business in Guillingen.* If we cannot have the pleasure of your company to-day, we will hope for it another time. Let me see: Thursday, Friday, or—Sunday? On that day the whole of the working world is free."

At this silly allusion, Williamson's color changed, and he said: "Well then, let Sunday, which for us workmen is a day of rest, be also for me a double festival, if it so please you." He raised his straw hat from off the fine hair that waved over his sun-burned brows, and bidding adieu to the company, disappeared down the wood path, which led in a contrary direction to the high road.

"An old acquaintance, I perceive," said the major, who had been remarking Marie Louise the whole time, and now seized the bridle of her horse, which, as absent in mind as its young mistress, seemed disposed to botanize in the wood.

Marie Louise did not hear the words, but the tone falling on her ear had sufficient power to restore her presence of mind. With eagerness she entered into conversation, and one subject after the other was discussed so fluently, that the Baroness Charlotte never once perceived any want of clearness in the current of her thoughts. But when, in the evening, the guests had departed, and the host, with his two friends, wished for yet another quarter of an hour to try the newly-purchased billiard table, she found herself alone, and clearness of thought was gone. All that had seemed agreeable and entertaining in the previous week, now appeared to her empty and wearisome; and the unbecoming tone of levity in her husband's conversation made her blush, in spite of her former assertion, that "such a man could never cause a wife to blush." Alas! when she compared the manner of the two on this occasion, how infinitely superior seemed Williamson, her former lover, to him whom she had chosen as her husband. At this moment, the burden of her wedded yoke fell with the weight of lead upon her consciousness. Her heart burned and trembled, and there was within her an outburst of passionate delirium, such as she had described to her mother; and quite forgetting the words of that tender mother:—"When you have once formed this engagement, which is to last for life, remember that never is a feeling to be untrue to him to whom you have given all"—she gave herself wholly up to the wildness of her grief, and forgot at the same time that her husband might each moment enter.

Both fortunately and unfortunately this did not happen. The quarter of an hour had grown into an hour, and this into hours, when Marie Louise, awakened from her troubled dream, arose from her sofa, and perceived the lights burned down in the sockets. At once was all clear to her. In trembling fear she cast a glance on the white curtains; she fancied that Von Walden must have laid down some time, after perceiving her condition, and leaving her, in just anger, to the stupefaction which followed the powerful excitement of her blood; but with a relieved heart, she found that he was not in the room, and now came the moment for blushing at herself: that the disorder in her husband's habits should afford a screen to her own dereliction from duty, and be looked upon by her with thankfulness.

She looked at her watch. It was past two. Marie Louise began to undress herself hastily, but seized by another idea, she stopped; lighted fresh candles, took a book to pretend to read, and sat down at her table to await her husband.

Scarcely had she begun to play this new part, when the door opened softly, and Von Walden entered with a somewhat uncertain gait, and in a condition in which Marie Louise had never yet seen him, and which she had never expected to see. To celebrate the arrival of the new billiard-table, the enjoyment of their game had been increased by a hastily arranged carouse. Occasional glasses, between snatches of jest and song, had been followed by deeper libations. Want of luck in play had increased Von Walden's irritability. The means for deadening his feelings of vexation stood near at hand; and the result was, that he was at length reduced to the most degrading condition in which a man can be seen.

Marie Louise shrank back in horror from his caresses. She could scarcely look at him, so contemptible did he appear to her.

"What, you have been sitting up and waiting for me, my little turtle-dove! and been sighing and weeping, I have no doubt. But what is the matter? I am rather merry, to be sure; but it is not worth while to sit there crying about it."

"I think so, too," said Marie Louise, who, feeling it was not the right moment for preaching reason, forced herself to a cheerful answer; but her heart beat violently, and her anger was with difficulty kept under control, in spite of her words.

"So! you think so, too? Well, that is right! Then, do you know, my goddess, what I am thinking of?"

"No. What then?" and Marie Louise looked uneasily around her.

"Well, nothing more nor less than that I shall begin to live every day as I like best; for, between ourselves, nothing is a more cursed and stupid restraint than when one is obliged to thwart one's inclinations! But why do you keep looking at the wall? Look at me! There, that is right! Now, look kindly at me, and kiss me, my little dove!"

"No, by Heavens! This is not to be borne!" and Marie Louise arose hastily, to take refuge in her dressing-room.

"Oh, your obedient servant, madame; no such manœuvre, I beg! For the sake of appearances in company, and in the presence of a discarded lover, one is allowed to make love a little; but when *tête-à-tête* with one's wife, the deuce take me if one gets proper respect."

The proud Marie Louise nearly sank beneath the weight of this moment's shame and grief.

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On the morning after this night, when Marie Louise had suffered so many different causes of anguish, she drove early to Segerstad. Her heart required the sympathy of another. She was ashamed; she trembled at the thought of confiding in her mother; besides this, it was twelve miles from the town. Segerstad lay nearer, and the baroness should be told, not all, but, at all events, enough to be able to assist her with her experience.

The baroness, who soon perceived that the early visit had more in it than a mere morning ride, led her friend to a pavilion in the garden, where they could talk undisturbed.

"Now, dearest Marie Louise, I see that something has disturbed you, although I know not what. With the exception of the first scene, in which you were rather at a loss, I must congratulate you on the manner in which you played your part yesterday in our drama in the wood."

"Afterwards, however," said Marie Louise, "fate assigned me another part to play. It is, perhaps, a weakness I should tell you, for I am almost ashamed at not being able to bear alone my vexations; but your advice may be of use to me."

"How, then? Surely not about the part you are to play on Sunday? As for that, you are the best judge of what is right. But whatever it may be about, only speak quickly; your solemnity quite makes me inquisitive."

Marie Louise related then the latter part of her night adventure. Her painfully and deeply wounded feelings did not spare Von Walden. The baroness could see very plainly how he had exhibited himself in the capacity of a gallant husband as well as that of an offended tyrant. But instead of breaking out into exclamations of surprise and contempt, she answered, laughing: "Good heavens, my dear friend, how fortunate you are,—you are really quite enviable."

"You are joking rather out of season, it seems to me," replied Marie Louise, half offended.

"I am not joking in the least! A wife who has been married three full months without seeing the wine-leaved crown of Bacchus on her husband's brow, is indeed to be envied, and I advise you, both now and in future, as your best friend, to behave as if your memory did not extend from night till morning. Look you, my dearest Marie Louise, we women must sleep as sound as rocks, if our instinct tells us, at the first turning of the key in the lock, that we cannot keep awake without being in danger of taking offence. Sleep, sleep, dear child, and thank Heaven that you are not obliged to sleep by day as well as by night—believe me, many wives are forced to do that."

"But," rejoined Marie Louise, who, against her will was amused, and unable to refuse a smile at her friend's grounds of consolation—"but, dearest Charlotte, only think if play should be the cause of these orgies!"

"In that case," continued the baroness, thoughtfully, "one can scarcely say that a wife does enough when she only sleeps; for, in case of need, she should even pretend to be stone dead."

"Why so?"

"Because the stone dead can neither speak nor give answers, and because words even from the lips of a seraph are still words; that is, little nothings, which are drawn from us in a moment of irritability by him who can give what coloring to them he pleases."

"Well, then, I understand," said Marie Louise, "and I will endeavor to sleep."

"But sleep gracefully, my love! Remember that this state of stupefaction must not hang over your eyes the next morning, for *then the tender* husband will ask why your *eyes appear so* heavy; and this question must be spared him, if you would not have to pretend to be actually dead."

The two ladies parted. And Von Walden, who was not awake when his wife had left home, but was now dressed, and advanced to meet her somewhat composed, was quite startled at Marie Louise's serious but perfectly pleasant and kind manner, which bore no trace of a remembrance of the night scene.

"Bless my soul, she is a perfect angel," said he to himself; "and such a wife deserves that one should respect her. This friendly look this morning is worth a thousand curtain lectures."

As a grand thank-offering, the card-table was not brought out that evening, and as to the key of the billiard-room, Von Walden had lost it.

"Really," thought Marie Louise, "Charlotte is a wise woman; may the expedient always succeed!"

CHAPTER XIX.

LETTER OF ENGINEER WILLIAMSON TO A FRIEND.

NOTHING but Jeremiads over my laziness! If, however, you knew the state of the case you would thank God that you only now and then get a scantily-filled page from me.

As the love affairs which my former epistles informed you of are now over, I can write more openly and confidentially, since your eye alone will see these lines. But the time of "sketches" is over; you must content yourself with very scanty fare, if you expect me to provide for your entertainment.

Our little town is an excellent town, a super-excellent town in one respect—viz., that one is seldom likely to catch colds or sore throats here. We live, you must know, in so warm an atmosphere, that the streets between one neighbor's house and another are quite lukewarm. And from whence do you imagine that this beneficial warmth proceeds, which thus sends its rays through the whole town, and sets our blood in such circulation, that in the midst of winter we could fancy ourselves in summer? Well, then, this fire escapes from the rosy lips and glowing tongues of our ladies.

You have never lived in so small a town, and have perhaps no idea of a *haute volée*, extending from the burgomaster down to the modest huckster behind his counter, which is joined in one grand conspiracy against the *haute volée* which happens to have chosen its residence outside the town; and as you do not know what it is like, I must tell you, my friend, that it is rather dangerous to fall between these two parties. At a few miles distance from the town lie several gentlemen's seats, belonging to the old as well as the new aristocracy. They have, very naturally, their own refined and fashionable society, and visit the town perhaps not more than twice a year. The town, on the other hand, has its very piquant and agreeable society, that made attempts formerly to unite with that of the country; rejected, however, by this latter, it, in its turn, rides the high horse, and woe to the unhappy member of the greater *haute volée* who by chance has fallen into the net of the little one. It will as inevitably be swallowed up as the fly in the spider's-web.

Father, you must know that we have also great people amongst us, and before rising from a jovial dinner-table, we drink to the prosperity of "trade and navigation!" Here you may see, for example, a merchant who looks upon the purchase of twenty hundred-weight of Dutch cheese as an affair of as great importance, and requiring the same penetration, as Rothschild when negotiating a loan of millions; there a son of Mercury, who, in silence, is praying to Heaven that the funds may fall, since in two or three posts he will have to honor bills to the amount of £133, which he has not yet been able to get together; there is a third, who tells you of his large transactions with England, because he has lately had smuggled over for him a dozen crockery-ware plates and as many tea-cups; and lastly a respectable retail dealer, who has given a northern house of business an order for four dozen Jomfraland mackerel.

Now confess yourself, dearest friend, if the commercial affairs of our town do not inspire you with as much respect as those of the East India Company itself.

Now that you are little acquainted with our locality, I must inform you that as long as the boundary between the two different parties was not encroached upon, all went on very well. Now, however, has the war-trumpet sounded a frightful alarm—that is, in the town.

You are aware that a young lady of the name of N—— (*with me she once had another* name that I now would fain forget) married, some months ago, the Lieutenant von Walden who is distantly related to our learned burgomaster. Before her betrothal, as you are aware, she inherited a very considerable and beautiful estate, on which stands a handsome residence, in the middle of the district occupied by the country *haute volée.* Madame von Walden, who was formerly acquainted with the fashionable society of the Baroness G—— of Segerstad, and being herself of a good family, was naturally received with open arms; and when she had been married about a fortnight, she persuaded her husband to take leave of all the almost daily festivities in the town, to go out to Malcolm's-Ness, her estate, although at that time it had lost its principal attraction, in the absence of their most distinguished neighbors, who had gone to the capital.

So much ingratitude and indifference the town had not expected of the young pair, who did not even invite the burgomaster uncle to visit them in Malcolm's-Ness. Some said—"Formerly, when the young lady lived in the humble bow-windowed room, and had nothing better to make herself smart in but a starched calico dress, we received her as if she had been our equal. No one was so little as to let her feel their superiority and her own insignificance—no, thank Heaven! that we were not."

"And we," said others, "who have thrown away an enormous sum on a dinner for the newly married couple, what have we got for it? Not even an invitation in return." "And we, too," complained a third set, "we gave the most brilliant balls, and expensive suppers, and got scarcely a call in return for our trouble. Oh, it is a scandal to treat thus her oldest and perhaps, after all, her most respectable acquaintances!"

Yet, what was all this? The mere humming of flies compared to the buzzing of a cockchafer, when we consider the anger of the burgomaster.

He, the grandee of the town, to be *cut* by a relation, nay, more, by a man who owed all his good fortune to himself; since, you must know, that if the burgomaster had not, "in the name of humanity," as Pellander would say, allowed a writ to lie in his desk, instead of having it served, Von Walden would at this moment have been philosophizing in prison, instead of playing the proud gentleman at "Rudolph Castle," as they say he wishes to have Malcolm's-Ness rechristened.

But as I have now told you all, my friend, you will perhaps ask why I have troubled my brain, and soiled a sheet of paper, with the relation of things that concern me in no sort of way, and interest you perhaps still less. Most certainly this proceeds from our endeavoring, whilst under the influence of an unhappy passion, to search after everything that can turn our attention from the pain of the inward wound, to which we afterwards become sensible again in spite of all our attempts to heal it.

Long enough has my heart been silent and closed to the friend of my youth: now shall you look into it. Now do I feel strong enough for such a revelation.

When Marie Louise, this ever adored woman, refused my proposal, it arose not from any want of love, but from a much more unfortunate want; I mean, the want of a pure heart. The breath of an evil spirit had wafted over her bright soul, and had sullied it with the sin of pride. My situation in life was too humble, my name too plebeian. Time brought a change. She became rich; but she soon began to perceive that riches do not secure happiness. I am not deceiving myself, when I tell you that her former love, now that she could anticipate a life with me free from all care, arose to a greater height than it would under any other circumstances. Yet, deeply and irrevocably as I loved, I was determined to show Marie Louise that she who would not share a humble lot with me, could never make me happy through her wealth. The fire of my love flamed up as high as hers, and her torments were also mine; but I succeeded in preserving my show of coldness, and each time that I was about to yield to the temptation to reveal my secret, the past stood up as a warning before me. Only in affluence, only when free from care, can Marie Louise love. A woman who does not prefer a moderate income, nay, even poverty, with the man her heart has chosen, to the most dazzling position in life,—she who, in her earliest spring time, has not felt this, has never truly loved. The time for calculation comes soon enough. Marie Louise was too young to know it, and yet she calculated.

I know not what desperate resolution led her to hastily decide her fate; and let me add that I am also unaware how long I should *have managed to struggle* against her and my *own united feelings*, if her choice of another had not ended at once the doubt and hesitation that she, at times, in spite of my better reason, forced me into.

I knew that Von Walden was a fortune-hunter, and a man without character. I had proofs against him; and to snatch Marie Louise from an abyss, I laid them before her. Alas! this was the first time that I had an opportunity of fully admiring this at the same time little and high-minded woman, who, the moment she had pledged her faith with a man, made his honor and his interests her own. You should have heard with what assurance her lips, until then unacquainted with falsehood, boldly endeavored to convince me that she knew all that she required to know concerning him, and that she would not know anything more!

Oh, Marie Louise! Marie Louise—for ever lost to me! My friend, forgive these lamenta. She was a woman who deserved to be mourned for, and the sorrow her loss has inspired will last for ever.

Since her marriage I have seen her only once: it was at the moment when, in the enjoyment of her triumph of her vanity, and whilst in a morning ride, she set the whole town in astonishment at the splendor of her dress and equipage. Ah, poor Marie Louise! how long will these gewgaws be able to fill up the void in thy heart?

Shortly after she removed with her husband to Malcolm's-Ness. Then the darkest night reigned in my heart. I am ashamed to confess that my weakness and depression made me almost forget myself. But all things have their time for developing themselves, even sorrow. Let us combat against it ever so much, it will master us. It has mastered me.

I will pass on quickly in my narration. A man may feel the pangs of love, but he must not describe them, for then he becomes womanish, and you know whether I would willingly become that.

Months passed on. I began to raise my head again, and in active and varied employment found the spring of a new life. God be thanked that labor is to me not only a pleasure but a want; nay, more even than a want—it is to me everything. Can you believe, my friend, that I have acquired, too, another passion, formerly unknown to me! I am become avaricious. I have resolved, through activity and steadiness, and what good qualities I may possess, to become a respected member of society, but also I will become rich, in order to prove to Marie Louise that the lot that I offered her did not after all deserve to be rejected with such contempt. Now and then I surprise myself in dreams, which it is perhaps not right to indulge in, but which spur me on with restless eagerness to reach my goal.

I write this at Guillingen, a very agreeable farm-house, where I have for the present taken up my residence. Guillingen lies not very far from Malcolm's-Ness, but for me the road would be always too long, since I should never use it.

My letter shall remain until the next post day, as I am now interrupted by my host, who wishes me to go out with him to see a swamp in the wood.

* * * * *

I have seen her again!—her! I have seen Marie Louise again!

Surrounded by company, belonging to the circle of which I spoke at the beginning of this letter, she was riding on horseback as I met her. You can little imagine what I felt, as I saw her so beautiful—more beautiful than I had ever seen her before—and yet so confused! I know not how it was that I contrived to summon courage and boldness to speak to her in a style that suited at once her present circumstances, and the familiarity of an old acquaintance. I think that I succeeded, and I rejoice in the belief that my self-possession helped her to recover hers.

He, Von Walden, who has plucked my sweet and beauteous flower—and it is much to be able to endure this man, and to show him the common politeness which educated people observe one to another—he invited me to Malcolm's-Ness; it is true, in a somewhat haughty and stupid manner, but still with an obstinacy that would admit of no refusal. On Sunday, only think, on Sunday, I shall see Marie Louise in her own house as a wife and mistress!

Sunday night.—I cannot, I ought not to write this evening! My reason lies again prostrate beneath the mighty storm of passion. Strange conflicts, which are foreign to my mind and heart, begin to perplex my soul, and becloud my understanding. What does all this mean? Did I not love before—had I not already an idea, a great and clear idea, of the power of love? I must smile, in pity at myself must smile. The bandage has fallen *from my eyes. I was* happy so long as I only loved, now I am unhappy, frantic, lost—because I more than love, because I burn with torments that rise up like flames out of an abyss before me.

How could this woman, who loves me, me alone, how could she dare before my eyes to permit the caresses of the man she must abhor? How could she smile and assume such a look of resigned tenderness, as she replied to his *fade* compliments? How came those glances, that seemed flashing from her, to fall alone on me, kindling within me a fire that nothing can extinguish? knew she nothing of this? no; she knew it not—since, trembling and panting like a convicted criminal, her eyes sought immediately another object, and her lips moved quickly and tremulously as she spoke of indifferent subjects.

This man is not to be endured! He cannot live without play; even this evening must he have recourse to this diversion. I excused myself.

Marie Louise walked up and down. There were only a few gentlemen there. With me she spoke little, but what she said was spoken with a familiarity that bewildered me. She spoke more with the others. Von Walden had the whole evening decided ill-luck. His temper began evidently to suffer from it, and after two or three imploring looks which Marie Louise, unperceived by the rest, but not by me, cast at him, across the table, his irritability seemed to have reached its climax. At half-past nine the supper was announced. "Is it not half an hour too soon, my dear?" asked he, with a look at his wife, for which I would have willingly boxed his ears. "We have guests, who may be wishing to leave," answered she, quietly.

It must be the custom of the house that supper should end the card-playing; since, in a very determined tone of voice, Von Walden said, "We will not end the game now, gentlemen! After supper, I shall see if I cannot take my revenge."

I saw Marie Louise blush deeply. And I saw her turn pale, as, on rising from the table, he said, with a sort of ironical playfulness: "Be so good as to take your places again, gentlemen. My wife, my little queen regent, has allowed a little relaxation in our household laws, and permits us to continue our amusement, although with the loss of her presence, since she dispenses favors and punishments at the same moment."

I took leave. I thought I observed that

Marie Louise was scarcely able to support herself, as I approached; and I knew the proud woman so well. To have suffered before me this affront! I felt, in my own heart, how hers must be swelling. She bowed a silent leave-taking. The others were gone. From politeness, or from another cause, she followed me to the door, between the saloon and the ante-room.

We stood on each side of the threshold. In the ante-room was no one but myself. The projecting fire-place hid her from the card-players. I seized her hand, and though my life were to pay for it, I could not have refrained from pressing it to my lips—as if, I know not how.

Marie Louise looked at me with a deep, impressive, strange sort of look—a look in which, for me, lay both heaven and hell. I thought I perceived the glistening of a tear, and I was not deceived. What must it have cost her not to have repressed it. On a sudden, however, resuming her mask, she drew back a step or two, greeted me with cold dignity, and vanished.

Do you believe that I returned home immediately? No; after I had ridden a considerable distance, I turned my horse and wandered down an avenue, and approached the house again; and there I perceived an object which was too holy to me, for me to venture to draw near to it at that moment.

Half concealed beneath the trees, and in the half darkness of a spring evening, Marie Louise was seated on a bench, leaning her head against the stem of a birch tree. Now was there no question of one starting tear; for, alas! they were gushing forth in an unrestrained stream. It was an outburst of the bitterest grief.

I stood only a few steps distant from her. But if I, at this moment, learnt to what a giant height passion can grow; yet had I still command over myself sufficiently to think of the danger I might do to her reputation. I flew, flew without looking behind me; but from a faint cry that reached my ear, I felt convinced that I was recognized.

Now you know all; and now you know, also, why I stand on the brink of an abyss.

Some days later.—Now all is right again! My blood is cooled, my mind is free—the evil is overcome; and who has saved me—who has saved us both? She. I know not how it has been with me this last week, but I have *recovered myself again.*

The day before yesterday the report was spread that the family at Malcolm's-Ness was about to take a long journey to the Springs, Baths, and I know not where. Heaven be praised! I am so happy in the thought that she has adopted this plan, rather than live in the neighborhood of him whom her duty commands her to avoid.

Marie Louise was always an admirable woman. Now do I worship her with a love as pure as she deserves. I return once more to my duties, to my occupations, never again to tread the path of error, on which for a short time I madly rushed.

I ask myself: would you not have conquered at last,—from your own strength have conquered? It would be satisfactory to be convinced of this; but how have many such combats ended? Once, twice, many times, are such temptations overcome, but there comes a moment when we are without weapons. Far better is it to avoid the danger altogether.

I have purchased the plot of building-ground adjacent to the house of Counsellor Utter. There I shall next year commence the building of a house, from which I shall always have in sight the little tenement where she once lived, worked, and loved. How rich, and, at the same time, how poor, shall I be in my remembrances, as I dwell in this house, already dear to me, because there I shall be able to call up constantly to mind the shadow of her from behind the curtains!"

This letter, whose feigned cheerfulness at the beginning reflected Williamson's melancholy, and at whose conclusion he wished to depict a calmness which he did not possess, was never sent; for when his spirit was really quieted, and his soul had recovered its accustomed equilibrium, he tore it in pieces. What follies it contained! Had he really lost his reason? Should her name, that was dearer to him than all the world beside, be exposed in this manner? Should she, the wife of another, be represented during her struggles with a weakness that she was anxious to overcome? Should she be betrayed by him on whose account she struggled? No, that would have been a baseness! Marie Louise was worthy of a nobler feeling, than such as required the sympathy of others to give it vent. She suffered alone, and so also would he suffer.

In vain his friends at home awaited a longer letter. They received only short notes filled with excuses on account of pressing business, &c.

CHAPTER XX.

He drew himself upright,
And made his speech outright.
STJERNSTOLPE.

"Ah, beloved, dearest child, when will thy mother see thee again?" asked Mrs. N——, as Marie Louise, with her husband had come into town to pay her a parting visit, and now sat at the side of her oldest and dearest friend, in the well-known sitting-room.

"Indeed, that God only knows, dear mamma, for Walden is determined, after our visit to the Baths, to make a tour abroad. It will be very entertaining to see a little of the world."

"Entertaining? I fear, my Marie Louise, it is not a desire for amusement that influences you."

Marie Louise blushed and was silent.

"Perhaps, my child, you have by chance seen him again who was once so dear to you?"

"Yes, mamma; and because it is so, and that I remember the words you spoke on the evening of my betrothal, will I go away from here. I would not oppose Walden, too, because I think it will be useful for him to remove from his old acquaintances."

"I know well what you mean, my child."

"Ah, mamma!" a deep sigh swelled Marie Louise's breast.

"I did not go to live with you," continued the mother, "not entirely from the reason I gave, but from the wish that you both should be thrown closely together. I feared that should I see what I did not approve of, I might not be able to preserve the silence that I ought, and that I might be too partial towards you; and such partiality shown towards one of a married couple may lead to incalculable mischief, especially in the early days of marriage. But although I have not seen my Marie Louise in her own house at Malcolm's-Ness, yet I have every reason to believe that she will prove a sensible wife. Yet I am uneasy at the report which says that Von Walden's unhappy propensity has begun to master him again—is it not so?"

"Yes, too certain."

"Well, then, my Marie Louise, I am far from thinking that this journey, from which you anticipate such favorable results, will afford him all the freedom he desires. He does not require his usual companions in order to indulge his desires."

"*But still it will be a change*, dear mamma. There will be ever new objects, and so much to see and hear."

"These novelties may amuse you, my child, and afford you entertainment and occupation, and in this manner become useful to you; but your husband, who has exhausted all these pleasures, may turn easily away from them to his prevailing passion; and think what may be your situation when alone with a gamester husband in a strange place—perhaps in a foreign land? What frightful results might arise? I warn you. Travel, if it must be so, to the Baths, although, God knows, such places are dangerous enough, but let nothing in the world induce you to take a longer journey."

Marie sat reflecting, her head leaning on her hand; she saw that in several respects her mother was right, but here the old unconquerable obstinacy interfered, in spite of her own sound judgment. The journey had been decided on—it would be too great weakness to give it up merely on account of imaginary dangers.

"You do not think my advice good; you will not follow it?" said the mother, sorrowfully. "Ah, Marie Louise, I will neither now, nor ever, force you to a confession that you repent of not following it on another occasion; but I trust that, now you have the testimony of experience, you will seriously and carefully consider. It is the time no longer for hasty resolutions."

"Hasty, dear mamma? I assure you, mamma, I have never had reason to repent of any resolution I have taken."

"What, dearest child, are we become such strangers to one another, that you must, even before me, take shelter beneath your unfortunate pride? Has your mother deserved this of you?"

"But, mamma, I assure you ——"

"Well, well, my child; so much the better. In this case have you only the more to consider whether you should risk your well-being and domestic happiness in this way. I can assure you that it will not be increased by this journey."

"It is still my intention, however, mamma."

"Ever blind, ever obstinate! When will my Marie Louise come to her senses? I fear not before she has tasted all that life has most bitter."

"And what does mamma call the most bitter?"

"When we in extremity seek for help, and find none, but fall powerless into the abyss, which our repentance and our sorrow make still deeper."

"How frightfully you speak to-day, mamma! We will hope that it is not the voice of prophecy. But, meanwhile, I am so deeply grieved to have pained you, mamma, that I do not know what I would not do to see you more cheerful again."

Marie kissed, tenderly, her mother's hand.

"I hear your husband's voice. He must not find us in so serious a conversation;" and Von Walden entered, humming a favorite tune.

"Well, dear mamma," said he, as he turned immediately to his mother-in-law, "has Marie Louise ended her confessions? Has she gone through the register of all my sins?"

"She has judged you too leniently, I think," answered Mrs. N——, in a tone which sounded more like earnest than jest.

"So much the better."

"So much the worse! A wife ought never to be blind."

"Oh, do not fear Marie Louise being blind. I can testify that her glance is the most penetrating that ever woman had," rejoined Von Walden, laughing.

"And what has she been able to penetrate? I should like to hear from you, as she herself would not like to bring it out."

"Well, let us see, my good mother-in-law. In the first place, she has discovered, very plainly, that I am somewhat of a frivolous fellow."

"That, I do not doubt."

"But, at the same time, she has discovered that this frivolity is of the most amiable and innocent description that one can imagine."

"That I doubt."

"Then I appeal to Marie Louise herself. Is it not true, my angel, that there is not the least thing that is bad in me? I am as soft as wax, and let myself be bent as you please; whilst you, to your honor be it said, have the most splendid talent for this bending process."

"Soft as wax, are you? that is certain," said Marie Louise.

"Now hear her yourself, mother-in-law. Besides this, I have a few little habits ——"

"Or, rather, many bad habits."

"Just so, but none dangerous. I like, it is *true, a merry* bout occasionally; not because I *am not very* happy in my own paradise, where *Marie Louise* alone reigns, and plays, at the same time, the part of Eve and the archangel, but because it is so entertaining now and then to look out at the gate and see how the world outside appears."

"That means, because you are tired of your garden of Eden."

"One is never tired of Eden, mother-in-law. This shows how long it is since you have played the part of Eve. But no enjoyment is so great as that which we, from time to time, go without, and only to secure myself this pleasure do I seek society."

"Well, what else do you like?"

"A goblet of good wine with a few good friends: that is not only to my taste, but it enlivens my spirits."

"And dulls them as well, if I remember rightly."

"That was only in the early, more happy times, my good mother-in-law; before our juice of the grape was adulterated. Now, the wine-merchants take care that we shall not run any risk of losing our senses."

"But we lose our money; since what is wanting in quality is replaced by quantity."

"Not at all! We do not take more wine than our fathers, although it may appear so; because we take at many different times what they swallowed at once. Alas! my honored mother-in-law, think, if we were to measure the two quantities, how many of our pretty glass thimbles would one require to fill a single one of those reverence-inspiring goblets which do so much honor to the strength and taste of our fathers?"

"Let this matter rest. But have you not another weakness to confess?"

"No; now I think the list is ended, if my memory does not deceive me. Or perhaps you, my dear Marie Louise, do you know of any other little sin to add to it?"

Marie Louise, during this talk, had fallen into thought, and followed the words only with the appearance of attention. She lay, leaning back on the sofa cushions, reflecting on her mother's advice.

"How," said she, and armed herself with a smile, "how can we know what you yourself do not know?"

"Are you not the better part of my soul, the archangel who knows every thing?"

"In the latter capacity, I must reveal that you have forgotten your worst sin. I mean that which gained me two shawls in the interesting wager."

"Ah, you little rogue, that I had quite

forgotten! But as you are not ashamed to betray me, I may as well confess that I have a little, but very little, inclination for play. I never play high, and never games of chance,—only a little innocent card-playing, as an amusement."

"But this, my son, is a very unfortunate way of spending time; and forgive me, my good Walden, if I speak a serious word with you; you will think that excusable in me as your mother?"

"Nay, for Heaven's sake, no preaching, my good mother-in-law! Marie Louise leads me with much better reins; and allow me, with all possible filial love and reverence, to declare, that no one has, nor ever will succeed in curing me of a fault in this manner, even in case it should be necessary."

Mrs. N—— became alternately red and pale; but whilst she did violence to her feelings, she said, in a tone that she intended to be calm, but which had a certain degree of asperity: "I pity the woman who dare only to speak half the truth; and I did not know that Marie Louise could have learnt this art so soon, which is doubtless very useful."

Marie Louise cast a look, not of reproach, but of sorrow on her mother, whilst she thought, "Mamma was right in her determination not to live with us; that would never do."

As far as Von Walden's feelings were concerned, it would have cost him nothing to have carried out the dispute a little longer, were it only to vex his wife, whose sensitiveness he perceived when her mother was offended. But in spite of being himself irritated at Mrs. N——'s answer, he went so far in his calculations as to see how his interest might be served, and a hold obtained on Marie Louise, by his playing the part of a perfectly submissive and polite son.

Marie Louise, who had been dreading an outbreak between her mother and husband, in which it would be a difficult matter to mediate, considering that her partiality would appeal for both, rewarded her husband with the most hearty and grateful look as he seized the hand of his mother-in-law, and kissing it respectfully, answered: "I am indeed sorry to have caused my good mamma any uneasiness, and to have called forth a remark, that perhaps was painful to Marie Louise; but let me assure you, that she understands me so well, *and so easily guides me* when I go astray, that you may quite depend on her wisdom! I am convinced that Heaven never created a more excellent wife than mine; and whom have I to thank for it, but she who made her what she is?"

Von Walden's look and manner were so calculated at this moment to inspire confidence, that even if he did not quite win over his mother-in-law, he perfectly appeased her.

And the end of the interview was, that Mrs. N—— promised her daughter and son-in-law to live at Malcolm's-Ness during their absence, and to superintend the household affairs.

"And now, my dear Marie Louise, it is time to think of our visits in the town. The carriage will be at the door immediately. But I really do not know how it is that the people here, one and all, behave to me as if they had all been steeped in vinegar—and even my respected uncle the burgomaster was in such a hurry, that he scarcely knew whether he had time to offer me a seat. Bless my soul! they are downright absurd, these our dear little townspeople!"

"They are offended, the whole town in a body is offended with you."

"I thought so," rejoined Von Walden; "but how is it that we are so unhappy as to have incurred the displeasure of the respected town?"

"In the first place, because you now belong to the aristocratic society, and also because when you left, you never invited the townspeople to your new home."

"This little perplexity," said Marie Louise, "I will soon set to rights, for it is pleasant to stand on a good footing with one's old acquaintances. Before I have been a couple of minutes with them, I will contrive that the offence be forgotten, and that, at least ten times in a minute, I am called their dear, amiable, good lady."

"Well, my angel," asked the lieutenant, "how will you begin? Now that we are starting on a journey, it will be difficult to remedy our first error, and when we come again, then, you know yourself, dear Marie Louise, that nobles and burghers can never be mixed up together."

"We shall have time enough in future to consider about this. At present I shall adopt a plan that lies nearer at hand; and we shall see whether, to-morrow, when we return home, heads will not be nodding at us from all the windows."

"But we are stopping too long," observed Von Walden. "Shall I ring for the maid, my love?"

"What do you say—ring?" Marie Louise cast a sly look at her husband. "Do you no longer know how?"

"Ay, truly, I know very well, and am still the same attentive husband; but where are the things, then?"

"Does not the dressing-room door stand open? Ah, my dear sir, one sees clearly that we are in the third month of our marriage! Be so good, then, as to fetch me my mantilla."

At the first house—it was of course that of the burgomaster—our young couple were received like two welcome strangers. But when Marie Louise bowed so deeply that her lips almost touched the hand of the old burgomaster's wife, and she addressed her by the title of "aunt," and said: "Ah, how fresh and well our aunt looks!" the old lady's mouth relaxed into a slight smile; and as Marie Louise, in the same breath, added: "A little journey into the country will certainly not do you any harm, aunt!" then the aunt's smile extended to her whole face.

After some mutual expressions of politeness had been exchanged, the young lady continued,—"We cannot have the pleasure of seeing our uncle and aunt at our house before we set off on our journey, as we could not trouble them to come out to us in the uncertain spring weather; we hope, at least, that mamma, who during our absence is to be at Malcolm's-Ness, will have the honor when she can offer them cherries or something good. As soon as we come back ourselves, it will be our greatest pleasure to see our friends often at our house."

"Ah, my dear niece, you are really too kind."

"Dear aunt, I beg you will not mention it, or I shall not be able to ask my aunt whether she would not like some fruit from Malcolm's-Ness for preserving. We have excellent fruit, and many different kinds, out of which you can choose what you like."

The burgomaster's wife followed her beloved niece not only to the threshold, but to the very lowest step.

At the other friends', the same scene was repeated, with only some slight alterations, according to the tastes of each individual, which Marie Louise knew so well. To some, she promised cuttings of rare plants; to another, the new French cauliflowers; to a third, asparagus; to a fourth, flowers, &c. But at one place, where it was somewhat more difficult to bring about a good understanding, she went so far in her politeness as to offer to a so called old friend, who was complaining of the difficulty of getting wool fine enough for a shawl she was knitting, a couple of pounds of particularly fine Spanish wool which she happened to have. This decided everything in the lady's favor. Out of the mouths of the owners of the sharpest tongues in the town flowed only honey and nectar; and it proved that Marie Louise was right: for the next morning, as the master and mistress of Malcolm's-Ness drove through the town on their return home, Mrs. N——, who accompanied them, could see how all the ladies of the town rivalled each other in the friendliness of their greetings.

The carriage stopped at Counsellor Utter's door. Marie Louise had not found Mistress Utter at home the day before, and she could not set off on her journey without taking leave of the good-hearted old lady. Now sat Aunt Gretchen, in her clean starched apron and her smartest cap, awaiting the visit of her grand acquaintances, with a tray prepared ready with wine and choice cakes.

Here no comedy was played. With an emotion that passed from heart to heart, Marie Louise pressed in her arms the good old lady, Williamson's mother-like friend, and Mistress Utter, who was noble enough to have forgotten the anger that Marie Louise had occasioned her in having caused so much grief to her favorite, returned the embrace quite as warmly, and spoke long and heartily with the young wife.

Whilst Von Walden was assisting his mother-in-law into the carriage and the counsellor was lamenting that he should lose his good neighbor so long, Marie Louise whispered to Mistress Utter, as she stood near her in the doorway: "Good Mistress Utter, remember me kindly to the friend—that I once had. I think I ought to leave a parting message behind, now that I am going so far away."

"I know not," answered Aunt Gretchen, quite as softly, "whether I ought to accept this commission. I do not think it is advisable to rouse up the bear when he is asleep. Forgive an old woman who speaks as she thinks, and therefore may whisper to the young one, that a message that she cannot give openly, ought never to pass the lips of a married wife! Bygones are bygones, and had better be forgotten."

Marie Louise answered nothing. She only

pressed the hand of the old lady, and her delicate-minded friend understood well the expression that passed over her face, when she once more, as the counsellor led her to the carriage, cast a glance at the upper story.

"The poor creature!" said Aunt Gretchen, when the visitors had left, "she will have too long to repent o her error!"

* * * * * *

As the landau drove up to the entrance of the principal building at Malcolm's-Ness, its occupants could see standing at the other end of the court-yard a red-brown gig, near which the unharnessed horse was busy taking a little refreshment.

"To whom does that carriage belong?" asked Von Walden, evidently surprised, of the servant who came to open the carriage door.

"To the Advocate Pellander—he has been here for a couple of hours, and wished to wait for your arrival." Marie Louise cast on her husband an inquiring look. She had never doubted but that he had fulfilled his promise of arranging his affairs. Nevertheless she could not but be surprised at this visit. Von Walden understood the silent inquiry of her eyes, and whispered in a low tone: "Fear nothing, my angel—this rascal and I have already done with each other."

Marie Louise led her mother to her room, during which Von Walden went to his own, where Pellander had established himself in a comfortable easy chair, and had employed the time of waiting for the lieutenant in an agreeable *siesta*. Awakened, however, by the entrance of the host, he stood up, and rubbing his eyes, said: "Your obedient servant, lieutenant; excuse my resting a little after my journey, as I waited for you! We have not seen each other since we had our little affair together."

"No, I have not had the honor," answered Von Walden, with ironical politeness: "but what procures me the pleasure of this present meeting?"

"Again a little business—but a far more respectable affair than the first."

"I do not understand what it can be about; but have the goodness meantime to be seated."

"A certain person, of the name of G——," began Pellander, "an old acquaintance of the lieutenant's, who has, as he says, written letter after letter to him, and as he has received no answers to any of them, has become tired of this loyal and respectful manner of trying to make h*imself heard*. He thought, he writes me, that the lieutenant would, in his altered circumstances, remember of himself the obligations between you, but as in this, as well as the hope of an answer to his letters, he has been disappointed, it is my duty to inform you that he has formed the resolution of having recourse to law. At the same time he has commissioned me, as a person well known to fame in the management of ticklish affairs, to propose to you, Mr. Lieutenant, a rather more respectable manner of settling the matter."

Whilst Pellander brought forward the business, Von Walden walked up and down, now stopping before a bird-cage and playing with the bird, now gaping, and now whistling. At last, as Pellander closed his lips, he threw himself negligently on the sofa, and cried: "Upon my honor, Mr. Pellander, you were born to make speeches."

"I was born to be an administrator of justice," answered Pellander, offended at the lieutenant's tone, as well as at the indifferent manner in which he received his communication, "and I wish to know what answer it pleases you to give to my proposal. Are we to have strife or peace?"

"Strife, by all means—yet, no, my good Mr. Pellander, I am not suited for such warfare. But, in confidence, let me tell you that I have at the present moment a great number of purchases to make for our intended journey, and must therefore request a year's delay. How much is the damage? The amount has escaped my memory, and it is not mentioned in this letter."

Pellander handed him a memorandum of the affair. Von Walden turned pale. "What the d—l!" cried he, as he stroked his chin several times, "that is indeed ——"

"Yes, yes," rejoined Pellander, with complacency, "I told you the affair was respectable. Yet that does not matter. I was always known as a liberal man. As you are intending just now to take a long journey, a lawsuit would naturally be inconvenient. It would therefore be better to listen to my propositions. The half of the sum in eight days from this, and for the rest, the delay of a year, of course paying the proper interest."

"Impossible!" cried Von Walden. "Are you in your senses, sir? Do you think I can coin money?"

"Any one who gets rid of it so quickly ought to be able to make it," answered Pellander, undisturbed, true to his duty and his usual free speaking. "Now, however, the only question is whether Lieutenant Walden chooses to have the matter settled, or not?"

"I cannot tell you. Be a little reasonable. A fourth of the sum, and a little douceur ——"

"Will never do; my proposals are definitive."

The matter was long discussed. At last Von Walden, taking into consideration several circumstances known only to himself and his creditor, was obliged to give his word that at the appointed time the money should be ready. This would be extremely inconvenient just at the present moment; but there was no escape. After being married only three months, he could not venture on entangling himself again in lawsuits, although it was his weakness and so-called principle always to gain time, were it only a few weeks or months, in the hope of finding fresh resources or expedients.

"What is the matter in question?" asked Marie Louise, as Von Walden entered the saloon and found her alone. "Nothing connected with your former bachelor days, I hope?"

"How can you ask such a question, my angel? Did you not, with your usual good sense, advise all those perplexities being put an end to at once; and do you not remember that the first weeks of our coming here was devoted to setting them in order?"

"My good Walden, if, however, there should be some little debts left standing, I entreat you not to deceive me, from any false shame. Be sincere, and, for God's sake, let them be paid, rather than undertake this journey, which could be very well postponed for a year. I do not know how it was, but I was uneasy directly I saw that man here."

"Ah, what fancies, my love. It is quite unpardonable in you to get hold of them. But to set you at ease, I must tell you what I actually promised to keep secret. The poor fellow has come to request a favor of me, in return for that which he did me, you know."

"God be thanked! that is delightful. I am glad it is nothing else."

"And yet it is not so very delightful;—I am to be security for him."

"For a considerable sum?"

"Oh, no it is really only a trifle—such people have no important affairs. Merely a couple of hundred dollars. But a man, to be quite regular in his affairs, should not give security."

"*You did not* refuse him?" Marie Louise's *heart felt a little* attachment for Pellander, since he had "in the name of humanity" so befriended Williamson.

"No, I could not bring my heart to it, my darling, since, on the whole, it is right pleasant to be able to help one's fellow-creatures, when it does not touch our own interests too closely."

The conversation was here broken off, and, very naturally, was not resumed.

Von Walden's present income, which had not yet suffered any great inroads, the greater part of his debts being yet unpaid, seemed too considerable for it to be necessary to grudge an occasional outlay. He was therefore of good courage, and had no intention to spare himself an indulgence that could be had for money.

It was arranged that, whilst he was obliged to be absent for a time with his regiment, Marie Louise should spend the interval at a mineral spring, from whence they would start on their long journey.

CHAPTER XXI.

FRAGMENT FROM THE LETTER OF A FRIEND TO WILLIAMSON.

"A LONG column of figures stood before me on the paper. I reckoned and reckoned, and thought I must have become silly, whilst, far from getting my business done, I felt my head begin to swim. Quite alarmed I got off my office-stool, and cried out with a loud voice: "Deuce take me, this will never do. I am ruining my health here. I shall be having a fit, if I do not have change of air. I will be off."

After this important resolution, which I had so suddenly brought to maturity, I sat down again quietly on my stool at my green desk. The figures had become plain before my eyes, so much had the idea of shaking the dust from off my brain already effected.

I went up to my wife, who stared to see me appear a whole quarter of an hour before dinner-time; and she stared still more when I said: "Listen to me, my little Augusta; we must travel, my child."

"What should we do that for?" asked she, looking at me somewhat mistrustfully.

"For many reasons, dearest 'Gusta. We will go to some of the Springs, or Baths, or some such place."

"We!"

"Yes, we, my child. You know that when I have once resolved on a matter, it is the same as done."

My little Augusta looked quite aghast. "During the ten years that we have been married, you have only taken two journeys on business."

"All the more necessary, then, that I should, for once in my life, take a journey for pleasure. Set off, then, my little old woman, and get together all that you want; set all the needle-women in the whole town to work—in a fortnight we must start."

And in a fortnight we did set off.

* * * * *

I and my Augusta, who in our dear home are a happy pair, did not at first know what we were about, when we found ourselves in the crowd of strange people and strange pleasures. But we joined in it all, for for this we had come. My friend, my dear friend, I have seen your old love, the young lady of the bow-windowed room. She is, indeed, a downright pretty and charming woman. She was here before us, and was at first without her husband. As one cannot, however, keep all the names in one's head that are stunning about one's ears, I had not paid any attention to hers. Her person, however, attracted my attention the first day; for she is so much courted and surrounded by so many people, that she could not fail to excite notice. At last I heard her name and found that I had an old acquaintance before me.

I do not know whether I ought to congratulate you or condole with you on the loss of this lady, who one day excites my admiration and the next my anger. She is beautiful, lively, amiable; but, upon my honor, she is at the same time vain, fond of dress, and coquettish,—at least so she appears. There is no woman in the whole place so given up to all its pleasures. She discovers them for herself, one madder than the other; but the others all run after her, and exclaim—"It is divine, and cannot be otherwise, since Madame Von Walden had proposed it!"

She is, however, kind-hearted. Many poor creatures she has in secret assisted: for one couple she set on foot a subscription, and that this succeeded well, you may judge, when she collected the so-called mites in a basket herself.

But now we have something new. Her husband has come from his regiment. That man is to me a tangled skein of silk. There is a report going about here, that at the place—I forget what it is called—where his regiment is quartered, he has been living like a Turk. When he came here he looked all the worse for it; and his wife must that evening have been in rather an excited state of mind. Since that time she has never seemed the same person. One day she will bloom like a rose; and the next, in spite of her efforts to carry her head high, she droops like a lily.

She has found favor in the eyes of my Augusta. She, who has a glance as searching as noble, sees the young woman from a closer point of sight than the others, who look at her only through magnifying and distorting glasses. Augusta has remarked that she suffers, and that she has hours of sorrow which do not agree with her lively manners in company. The poor little thing!—And he, the wretch! is for ever card-playing with a set of kindred spirits, not, as you may well imagine, of the best sort. Their days are devoted to amusements of a suitable nature to the evenings which succeed them.

It is not to be denied that this woman has a dignity about her which inspires respect. One can see that she has still some influence over her husband; and it does one's heart good to see and hear how kindly, how skilfully, she understands how to give a coloring to his frequent absence from the company and from herself; and how, when he returns, she has ever a smiling and cheerful word upon her lips. One sees, also, if this word does not appease him in time; that an evasive look, or a serious expression on her countenance, can arouse his irritability, which not often is vented on little things. She requires much reason, and she has it; and yet I fear that in the end no means will avail. * *

They have left. On the last evening that she appeared in society, she was dazzling. She wafted roses around her, and roses bloomed upon her cheeks, and wit flowed from her lips. She left a painfully sweet remembrance behind her, in the circle where she had been so admired. But my Augusta and I, we pitied her.

To-morrow we also return to our happy, peaceful home, and are grateful to God that this time is over. At least ten years will pass over, before we shall be tempted again with the desire of not only seeing, but joining in, the follies of the world. I longed for, nay, I pined after, my old desk, and Augusta after her little ones, her kitchen, and pantry. Would to God the admired Madame Von Walden had been like my Augusta, and she would then have chosen a safer lot than that which doubtless awaits her.

* * * * *

My friend William, my dear friend! these lines I write at home. I wish you could have seen us! You have a heart to understand what a home is. The children hung weeping round our necks. Even on my desk-stool, my true old companion, I let fall—God forgive it me!—a great tear of joy. But I was ashamed of the tear, and wiped it off again.

Say, now, whether I too have not sent you what deserves to be called a "Sketch!"

God bless you! Let us hear from you soon; and send us something different from your eternal scraps, which, as you are pleased to observe, contain always the same story—viz., "Next time more."

Thy friend, KARL.

Part the Third.

CHAPTER XXII.

Alas! unheeded is my anxious prayer,
My tears unnoticed fall;
Like as a flower I fade in autumn's air.
VITALIS.

Two years have passed away. Marie Louise had in this period tasted of nearly every species of froth that rises on the cup of life. She had travelled, lived, and enjoyed; she had laughed, wept, and suffered; she had been fêted and worshipped as one of the idols of the day; she had shone in the society of towns, and coquetted at mineral Springs and Baths;—and now it has become time to seek repose, and put an end to all this dissipation before it becomes fatal to her peace.

Alas! in many a night of sorrow and loneliness, she had in vain sighed after this repose, and done all in her power as a woman and a wife to check the speed with which they both were hastening to one common end; but Marie Louise had no longer any power to influence Von Walden, nor was she able to separate from him.

They had now returned again to Sweden, brought home by the impossibility of obtaining any longer from their steward the enormous remittances which Walden constantly demanded; and on their way to Malcolm's-Ness, were again at the same Baths from which they had set out on their travels two years before.

Partly influenced by the hope of being able here to have recourse to some of his usual expedients for arranging his disordered affairs, and partly held by the reins of his ungovernable passion for play, Von Walden postponed from day to day his departure, in spite of the emptiness of his travelling purse, and in defiance of the entreaties of Marie Louise.

It was evening. The lady's maid, wearied out with waiting for her master and mistress, had fallen asleep, but sprang hastily up as she heard voices approaching, and, lighting the candles on the toilette-table, she opened the door.

Marie Louise entered, throwing off the light mantle which covered her ball dress. She was followed by Von Walden, no longer in the vigor of youth, but sallow and haggard, an evident victim to secret orgies. He threw himself negligently on the sofa.

In Marie Louise's face was to be perceived, at first, no remarkable change, but as the ornaments of the toilette one after another disappeared,—as the tresses of her hair were put back and concealed beneath the simple lace cap, then could it be seen that the fresh roses of her cheeks had, like the peace of her mind, long since faded away. Yet, still could this woman look proudly around her; for amidst a thousand temptations had she stood safe and firm. Not once had the breath of slander fallen on her fair fame. Society had engrossed her senses, but not her soul. She had restlessly endeavored to hasten the flight of time, and had tried to escape that which, under the mask of gaiety, told her that she was irrecoverably wretched. Such was the fate of Marie Louise; such is the fate of thousands of women, and such will be that of thousands more.

Yet was she still beautiful, and an expression of the sweetest joy, quite different from that which had appeared on her countenance as she entered, now lighted up her features, as with a light in her hand she entered on tip-toe the open door of an inner room. There slumbered in peaceful repose a child on his little snow white bed; Marie Louise was a mother; she possessed a being whom she could love, and for whom she could live. In spite of this, however, she dared to call herself unhappy. She passionately loved her little son, now more than a year old, and devoted to him a considerable portion of each day. Yet, at times, she required a more powerful diversion to her thoughts, when care and anxiety, at the constant irregularities of her husband, gnawed at her peace, and when the slumbering ashes of her own former passion revived, and rekindled also her repentance and despair.

As yet, however, she had no conception of the bad condition of their affairs, since Von Walden, who more than ever had recourse to falsehood and deceit of all kinds, had prevented her, by false pretexts, from seeing any of the letters that he received from home. Those that she received from her mother were, indeed, full of uneasiness; but could not this uneasiness be sufficiently accounted for in Von Walden's extravagant expenditure and long delayed absence from home?

After Marie Louise had impressed a light, yet tender kiss upon her child's brow, she returned again to her own room. Her eye now fell for the first time on two letters, which lay on her table. The maid was gone; the husband and wife were alone.

"Have you seen these letters?" asked Marie Louise; "one is from mamma to me, the other is for you."

"How should I have seen them? Who the d—l can see all this stuff? I have at least ten or twelve such in my pocket-book, but as they have no doubt all the same contents, there they may lie." Von Walden had, in fact, spared himself of late the vexation of reading the threatening letters of his creditors.

Marie Louise broke open her mother's letter, and, as she read it, an expression of the deepest agitation passed over her countenance. When the letter was ended she was near fainting; but, conquering this feminine weakness, she twice essayed to speak, but her voice had forsaken her.

"Well, what are these interesting and remarkable tidings? They seem to prevent you from being able to sing your usual evening song."

"Good God, Von Walden! how can you joke?"

"Why not? I shall like to know, even if it is something very affecting, why I should weep?—whining suits women better than men."

"Do you know what is going on at home?" asked, at last, Marie Louise, with a violent effort.

"No; but I have no reason to think that anything is going on wrong."

"This is frightful. You have deceived me; your largest debts were unpaid when we left Sweden. Lawsuits are commenced in every direction; executions have followed one after another, and the steward, who is in the greatest perplexity, threatens to leave everything to take its course, if you do not immediately return to arrange matters."

"A remarkably pretty state of things, I must confess; and especially effective must it be, described by your mother: it will lose nothing by her telling."

"Are you not ashamed to torment me in this way? You know full well how long mamma has spared me the knowledge; just so long as it was possible; but now our situation can no longer be kept a secret, and it is thought that if we would save something for the future, we must sell Malcolm's-Ness, and purchase a smaller estate."

"What? Malcolm's-Ness be sold? Yes, indeed, that would be an excellent way of settling matters; and it shows the great sense of those who propose it. Trouble yourself no more about the whole concern. I can manage my affairs best myself; and when I return, I will soon, upon my honor, put a new face upon the matter. That fool of a steward is quite unsuited for his office."

"When shall we start? Ah, my good Walden, let us set off to-morrow?"

"To-morrow! Why not? I must, however, procure some travelling money, for I have nothing but two miserable pieces of ten dollars left, which will not go far in settling our account here, and paying our way home."

"Good God! Where, then, is the money that was in the cash-box?"

"Gone to the d—l!" was Von Walden's laconic answer.

"That is frightful," said Marie Louise, turning pale. "How could you leave us so penniless?"

"This is the usual way. The women take the easiest part upon themselves, of complaining and lamenting; whilst we are forced to employ all our dexterity and penetration to get out of the difficulty."

"You must borrow—humiliating as it may be."

"Humiliating, indeed. But it is no easy matter to get money that way, when I have already borrowed so much, that I do not know to whom I could apply."

"And the money you have borrowed?" sighed Marie Louise.

"Out of inward sympathy, has gone to keep company with the rest."

"And we are then in the most deplorable extremity. What, in the name of heaven, must be done?"

"Yes, discover that if you can; that would be more creditable to a woman than lamenting over what cannot be altered."

Marie Louise was silent for some minutes, and then said, slowly, as if considering to herself: "If you will promise me faithfully that we shall leave to-morrow——"

"Well, what then?" asked Walden, eagerly, with the look and tone of a bloodhound.

"Then, but only in that case, I have a little sum put aside, that I saved luckily in case of any pressing occasion; I know of none more important than that we should get home directly, and I think the sum is sufficient."

"Spoken as becomes a good wife, my darling! you see that I have not forgotten my old love-making names, when you behave as you ought. Where is your treasure? Hand it over to me!"

"To-morrow will be time enough, when you have arranged every thing for our journey."

"Indeed! so now we are to have suspicions again, I see? Well, keep your savings—we will stay where we are. I have credit, and I can enjoy myself as long as it lasts."

"Dear Walden! do not speak so. You know that we must return home."

"Certainly, when I have got money, and can make up my accounts."

"Well, then, I will give it to you to-morrow morning early—now we must go to rest."

"Rest as much as you please, I shall take a little walk, as I have nothing to do at home."

"Will you not sleep?"

"No."

"That means that you are angry with me!"

"No."

"Ah, do not be so hard upon me—promise me, at least, faithfully, that you will remain at home if you get the money directly!"

"Yes, certainly—but do not plague me any longer."

Sighing, Marie Louise went to the writing-desk, and, opening a little secret drawer, took out a money-case.

But the case was—empty!

"Good heavens! what is this?" Marie Louise pressed her hands to her brows in agony.

Her last resource was gone.

It was a painful sight, that expression of consternation and despair upon her countenance, contrasted with the remains of her ball costume, not yet thrown off.

"Did you mean *that* money?" asked Walden, with a look which only expressed a sort of negligent surprise; "that I made use of a long time ago!"

"And you took this money? It is not possible!"

"I see nothing impossible in it—I only wish it were there to take again. Man and wife should have but one common purse, I think."

"In certain cases—but secretly to take money from each other, good God!"

"No exclamations, I beg. Thine is mine, and mine is thine—so I understand the ceremony of betrothal, and whether one takes money out of a drawer or any other place, it is still common property."

"And now, are we without resource—wholly without resource?"

"Yes, so it would appear, in case you have not by chance another treasure, saved out of the liberal allowance for pin-money that I set aside for you."

"That was scarcely sufficient for the purpose. This other sum, however, was the remains of a little capital that I possessed at the time when I had the command of my own property."

"In other words, the time when I had the command of my own liberty, and lived each day as it pleased me, and was not exposed to losing my patience in listening to all the jeremiads that matrimony has inflicted on me. Ah, that was a fine time!"

Marie Louise was silent. Her eyes sought to penetrate through the darkness to the heaven that overhung alike the earth and her own sorrows with a gloomy cloud. "Alas!" thought the suffering woman, "who would not be there!"

Neither of them broke the silence. At last Von Walden took up his hat and went to the door.

"I entreat you," said Marie Louise, earnestly, "do not go out to-night—let us consider seriously what is to be done!"

"We have considered enough, as there is no money to be had! A couple of friends await me—my last dollars may as well go to see if they cannot bring others to keep them company."

"No, in the name of heaven, do not go!

What will people think who might meet you at this hour, and the public rooms are all closed?"

"Who wants the public rooms? I am invited to join an acquaintance who has a little bachelor's party in his rooms—that is all!"

"But you are not a bachelor, my good Walden!" Marie Louise tried to move him by affectionate words.

"No, alas! but that need not prevent my taking a part in a merry bout."

Marie Louise entreated, entreated long—but in vain. Von Walden went.

What hours were then passed by the unhappy wife. Walking up and down her room, her thoughts flew back over an interval of four years, to the time of her quiet life in the obscure bow-windowed room. A future of light and blessedness had then lain before her; but her heart, possessed by the ignoble passions of vanity and pride, had spurned and regretted the peaceful heaven offered to her, to embrace a phantom of happiness that had never, never been realized! And to what had her pride and her love of shining led her? Into this frightful labyrinth, out of which she could see no chance of escape. For come what would, Walden would never reform. Nothing, no love, no sacrifice, no change of circumstances, not even the most fearful misfortunes would ever check his unfortunate passion. As long as a single stiver of their property remained would it be squandered by him. Where could she turn too with her child, and her aged and infirm mother? And how would she now be judged of by those who formerly envied her? How would they triumph, when they saw her return home, God alone knows how? Yes, God alone knows—for she could not even realize to herself the whole misery of her position.

And the only friend in whom she could now have confided, she who perhaps by her counsels had fostered her unhappy failings, she was gone, for ever gone! The Baroness Charlotte, in the first year of their absence from home, had been snatched away by death. The baron had sold Segerstad. Nowhere had she a friend from whom she could ask either sympathy or advice. Alas! what a painful want! to pour out her complaints to her own mother, whose counsel and warnings she had so opposed, for that was Marie Louise still too proud—and of what use would it have been? They understood each other, and the mother *read in the heart of her* daughter both her sorrow and repentance, without their clothing themselves in words.

The night became stormy. Dark clouds hung over the sky, and rain began to beat against the windows. The hours passed slowly. Marie Louise listened anxiously for footsteps in the street. She went to her child's room, and sank on her knees by the side of its bed. She prayed fervently for peace and courage; she prayed that, for the sake of her child, a ray of light might penetrate the darkness of her soul, and show her the way in which she must follow.

Strengthened in mind, she arose to pursue again her pacings to and fro in her own room. She considered every expedient. To borrow from friends? Impossible! And besides, even this resource had been exhausted by Von Walden. She possessed things that could be disposed of—ornaments of value; this would be a means. But, alas! how humiliating, should it be known; and, in such a place, how could it be concealed? To write home, and await there the return of letters, would require too much time; and besides this, Walden had but lately received money for their return home, which was all that could be got together. Marie Louise could understand from her mother's letter, that large sums had been raised upon the estate; and now all—all was lost.

Without having fixed on any certain plan with respect to the means, Marie Louise had, however, before morning dawned, adopted the firm determination to return, even if alone with her child, to her home—the home that might be hers for so short a time. At length she heard the footsteps of some one in the street. The step was too well known to her, although it seemed now even more unsteady than usual. Prepared for the worst, and yet struggling to overcome her trembling, she opened softly the door.

Von Walden's appearance betokened but too plainly how the night had been spent. Marie Louise offered him a chair, but he rejected it, and sank, dressed as he was, upon the yet undisturbed bed.

"Well, have you nothing to ask?" said he, with a fiercely wild laugh.

"No! unless, what o'clock it is; I did not hear it strike the last time."

"If you want to know, you must wait until it strikes again, for my watch has gone, with the last card, to the d—l."

"Your gold watch—the one I gave you?"

"Yes—the one you gave me. So tenderly —only think! How could I find it in my heart to part with it? But it is gone, nevertheless —to save my honor. You know that one must keep up appearances."

"But the chain—for Heaven's sake! you have surely kept the chain? It was my hair!"

"I did not think of the rubbish. The chain was included in the bargain; and as the good friend to whom I lost it was always one of your admirers, I hope he will take this keepsake as a compensation for the rest of the money I owe him."

The last trace of color forsook the cheeks of Marie Louise. She was perfectly convinced that Von Walden had still sufficient sense of honor left to demand back when sober again the chain; but to know it, in the mean time, in such hands, thoughtlessly thrown away by her own husband—oh, it was indeed bitter! and tears, which until now had been refused her, gushed from her eyes, as she thought of this humiliation, so galling to her sensitive feelings as a wife.

Von Walden fell asleep at last, after laughing at her tears, and ridiculing her gestures of sorrow and despair. But the next morning, when in her morning dress, and after being up the whole night, she approached his bed, and awakening him, entreated him to get up and dress himself before the maid should see him, the events of the night returned clearly to his remembrance, and, without saying a word, he dressed himself hastily, and went out. It was of importance to him that this affair should not get wind; and besides this, some of the restraints of honor had yet dominion over him. He would not have wished to have given away thus his wife's hair; it was done without knowing it. An hour after, he returned, and threw the chain down upon the table. "The trumpery has cost me more than it was worth," said he.

"How so?" asked Marie Louise, as she took back the now superfluous gift.

"If I would have left it, I could certainly have borrowed something on it."

"For God's sake be silent, in mercy!" Her cheeks were dyed with the blush of scorn, and, leaving her husband, she went to her child's room.

"Do not waste your time there!" called Von Walden after her.

Marie Louise, who at her husband's return had sent away the maid, took now herself the little one in her arms, and returned with him into the bed-room.

"What in the world do you want with the child?—let him be quiet!"

"I only want to take care of him;" and giving the child some flowers to play with, which she had worn the evening before, she placed him in her lap, and leaning her head on the golden locks of the little seraph, she said, in a low voice: "Shall we now deliberate on what must be done?"

"With all my heart. What ornaments have you? There is a person here who can lend us money on them."

"And will they be silent?"

"I think so; but if not, a little cash is even more necessary than silence. A little perplexity of the kind on a journey is the most trifling occurrence in the world, and might happen to anybody."

"I look upon it, however, as the most painful circumstance imaginable. I can, indeed, scarcely venture to look out of the window, in the fear that our dilemma could be seen on my face."

"Do not talk such nonsense! On the contrary, you must this evening appear unusually well dressed at the Countess A——'s party—remember, it is our last evening. In whatever perplexity we are, we must have enough presence of mind not, by want of tact, to draw attention on us."

"And do you think that, on such a day, I could go into company—impossible!"

"I do not think it, my precious one, I require it. Do you understand, Marie Louise? I require it!"

"You may do what you please yourself, but I am determined not to go out until we leave our rooms to return home."

"I am sorry for this resolution, since, in that case, I suspect there will be no longer any question of returning at all."

"Do not drive me into going beyond the bounds of the submission I have always shown you, Walden," entreated Marie Louise, with ever-increasing agitation, "for to-day—I must tell you at once—to-day I am determined not to submit."

"Really? You quite astonish me!"

"It may be so!"

"It is only a pity that I do not like being so surprised, and am therefore obliged to request you to be so amiable as to return to your duty."

"My first duty is to seek a shelter for my child," said Marie Louise, as she pressed the boy closely to her bosom; "and if you will not arrange your affairs so that we can start to-morrow, then——"

"Then?"

"Then I shall return by myself. This is my firm and unalterable resolution."

Walden burst at first into loud laughter; but after having observed his wife more closely for a few minutes, he began to perceive that he had driven her to a point where a joke on his side could effect nothing. He advanced a few steps towards her, and said: "Give me the jewels."

"When you have promised me that we shall leave to-morrow; that the post-horses shall be ordered to-day; and that I shall be allowed to decline the invitation of the countess."

"No, upon my honor, this is somewhat too strong!" exclaimed Walden, passionately. "You dictate to me one thing after another like a schoolboy. Please to remember that I am your husband, whom you are bound to obey, and not your slave, whom you may command."

"There is no question of commanding on either side," replied Marie Louise, with feigned composure; "and my last word is, that I will not give up a single jewel on any other conditions than those I have said."

"And of what use are your conditions? Do you not see that I must receive your jewels, turn them into gold, write an order, and yet have very good reasons for fixing our departure for to-morrow?"

"Certainly; and you can also lose at play this money, which will afford us the only means of leaving this place. But I have yet sufficient confidence in you to feel convinced that you will not deceive me so cruelly. And is it not also necessary for you yourself to leave, for in a few days you will have nothing left either to play with or live upon?"

Von Walden, who himself could see that this latter fact was as clear as day, and yet was incapable of willingly yielding, to give his thoughts another direction, took up, mechanically, the yet unopened letter. The contents were short, but they were sufficient to change all hesitation and irresolution into strength and determination.

The letter contained only these lines:

"If within fourteen days from this time you do not return to give me a personal interview *in your own home, in order to come to* some decisive settlement, I swear solemnly that I will make public all the circumstances connected with your debt to me. In case you should wish any longer to put my patience to the proof, and cause my ruin, Pellander has positive instructions how to proceed. Take your choice! C. G."

Marie Louise had with uneasiness watched the countenance of her husband. His face expressed at once anger and dismay. But quickly resuming a tone of careless indifference, which he thought best suited to deceive his wife, he said, with a lengthened yawn: "Nothing of importance, only an old friend, who is at the point of death."

"And our journey; what do you resolve upon doing?"

"Why, not to hear this detested preaching any longer, I will get ready for it. Give me the jewels and be quiet. I will order post-horses this evening, so as to give our departure the appearance of necessity. Your mother is suddenly taken ill, we can say, and you will, you must, return to see after her. Ah, that will be believed by every body who knows the ungovernable impetuosity of women when anything is amiss."

"I hope some other pretext will occur to you," said Marie Louise. "Even the idea of such a pretended calamity makes me shudder."

"Well, shudder if you please! I know I shall have enough to do before I have been round to tell the tale to every one, but now, be quick; the horses must be at the door by six o'clock."

Marie Louise brought out the greater part of her costly jewels.

And Von Walden, who was now impelled by a powerful motive to the performance of his promise, arranged everything so that they actually started on their journey at the appointed time.

As Marie Louise sat in the carriage, her thoughts turned back to the interval which had elapsed between her first and last visit to the place she was leaving, and, with a sigh, she said to herself: "What is called the bloom of my youth has not been without thorns; and the future which awaits me will indeed have few roses to offer."

CHAPTER XXIII.

> No longer call
> The joys of life;
> The star of hope
> With golden day
> Lights up no more
> The world for me.
> STAGNELIUS.

MARIE LOUISE lay on her mother's bosom—this ever loving and faithful mother, who had exerted every effort to do her duty in the difficult position in which she had been placed.

Now that she had Marie Louise again with her, and held in her arms her little grandchild, she felt that all her sorrow and all her hours of anxiety were atoned for.

"God be praised!" said she; "now can we at least bear together whatever stroke may fall on you; but, my child, you must prepare yourself for the very worst."

"I am prepared, mamma: I am calm, perfectly calm—if only you had not to suffer on my account."

"Then I should be no mother, my child. But if Walden would only listen to reason, and be persuaded, now there is still time, to sell Malcolm's-Ness and purchase the little Brody estate, we should at least see something like security for the future."

"He is so determined in the matter, dear mamma, that all arguments are vain."

"Well, he will soon be forced to it, when it, perhaps, will not sell to such advantage as on the terms now offered."

"Terms offered! Has there, then, been any talk of selling it?"

"Not exactly, since the matter could not be discussed until Walden had been conferred with. But there are two gentlemen in M—— who wish to purchase the estate. They applied, through an agent, to the steward; since, in the neighborhood here, my child, Walden's embarrassed circumstances are sufficiently well known to justify such an application."

"Is it, indeed, come to this?" sighed Marie Louise, whilst she hid her face in her hands.

"Do not view it in a worse light than it deserves, my child. When one is on the point of losing much, one may thank God that something is to be saved. Brody is a pretty little estate. It does not bring much in, to be sure, but quite enough for a quiet, humble manner of life; anything, too, is better than staying here at Malcolm's-Ness *for another year* or two, only to leave it as *beggars at last.*"

"Alas, mamma! that fate awaits us any how, for whatever comes to Walden's hands, whether much or little, it goes all the same way."

"But this must be provided against, my Marie Louise! The same good, ever right-judging friend, who, during your absence, has several times assisted me in difficulties, which my situation here exposed me to, is at the same time the agent for these gentlemen of whom I spoke; and as he sees that you and your child's future comfort can be secured by this means, he has suggested the purchase of Brody. Although he has not gone much into your private affairs, yet he has advised as a friend that, in case Malcolm's-Ness should be sold, a portion of the proceeds should be claimed for you. In this way, Brody would be yours, and Walden, to his own advantage, be prevented from getting rid of it."

"I guess who this friend is, who has so much at heart my future security; but—"

"But what? Have you not duties to fulfil towards your child?"

"And towards my mother, my beloved, good mother, whose latter days, with unpardonable thoughtlessness, I did not secure from want when I had the means. Oh, that is my greatest trouble! But I always fancied that the possessor of Malcolm's-Ness could never have to weep for such an error."

"Care not for me, my dear Marie Louise. I have not yet forgotten how to prepare my old chocolate cakes; and besides, our little town would never let me feel want. But we have not yet come to that. I shall still remain with you, and if you will only follow my advice, you will always have a shelter to offer your mother under your own roof."

"Alas! one knows not what may be left when Malcolm's-Ness is divided, and each one takes his share; and, moreover, believe me, no one will persuade Walden to allow it to be sold."

Whilst this conversation between the mother and daughter took place, Von Walden sat with the steward in his office. And the more he heard and the more he saw, the paler became his cheeks and more expressionless and vacant his eyes. With arms and legs crossed, he at last threw himself back in his chair and exclaimed: "It would be just as well to send at once a bullet through my head and it would take less time than to unravel all these matters."

The steward ventured now to hint at the

sale of Malcolm's-Ness, and to mention the proposals that had been made for its purchase.

"Not a word, not a word of such a thing! The master of Malcolm's-Ness has some chance of credit, so as to stop up these deuced gaps, if he can only get time; but Lieutenant Walden, without this appendage, can do nothing."

"Everything would be managed, if Malcolm's-Ness were only turned into money," resumed the steward; "and there would then be a very pretty capital, which could be laid out on another estate; for example, on Brody, which, next spring, is to be sold."

"Say no more. That will never do; it must remain as it is, as long as it can. To begin with—however, let us see, what must be done first. Do you say, we really have no cash left?"

"Not one penny, as you will see, sir, by these books which I have laid before you. In the mean time—within six weeks—besides a number of lesser bills, two very considerable ones must be paid; it will be necessary, therefore, to come at once to a decision."

"Something must certainly be done, for on another side I am in a perplexity."

"No expedient is to be found, except the one proposed, since too many bonds have been given already for any loan to be raised sufficient to supply the deficiencies."

"I can discover a better plan myself. I see very plainly that it will not be sufficient; but, at least, it will stop the mouths of these cormorants for a while. All my moveables must be sold off."

"That I am perfectly aware of. But how far will these go, since several of them are already under sequestration, and must be sold for the good of the creditors?"

"My equipages, and carriages, and horses, shall also go."

"Yes, that is a matter of course."

"And my riding-horses as well; must I give this luxury up?"

"They are sold long ago, for the debt to ——."

"Well, then, let the cattle and farming stock, and the very seed for the ground, be put to the hammer; but not the place itself."

"And with what will the land be ploughed and sown?"

"Oh, time enough to think of that! For a year or two, I will get people to farm the land for half the crops, whilst I arrange my affairs. I am convinced that I can soon get myself out of the dilemma. Meantime, however, I must speak with a clever man of business. Send for Pellander."

A fortnight afterwards, it was the second Sunday after the return of the proprietors to their estate, a long advertisement was to be read on the church door, signed by Josias Pellander, to announce that, "on the premises at Malcolm's-Ness, a public auction would be held, at which, to all connoisseurs, the gold and silver plate, furniture, cattle, &c., &c., would be offered, with one month's instalment."

On the morning of this terrible day, Marie Louise shut herself up in her bedroom. Incessantly the frightful announcement sounded in her ear: incessantly did she see the pitying shrugs of her wealthy friends, which were as painful to think of as the cutting remarks that would fly from mouth to mouth in the little town. "Alas!" thought she, as she almost sunk under the torture that her pride endured this day, "not a single voice will pity me, without the addition of some contemptuous words."

"Yet there is one who will!" suggested a remembrance in her troubled mind; but to be pitied by him was rather a pain than a consolation.

"Take the matter coolly, my dear," said Von Walden, who, in spite of the entreaties of his mother-in-law that he would leave Marie Louise to herself, had penetrated to her quiet room; "in two years, our affairs will stand in as good a condition as when we left home; and as you are a woman of sense, you ought to have philosophy enough to see that two years of enjoyment are worth two years of self-denial."

"Such sophistry cannot console me," answered Marie Louise.

"That is very unfortunate. I wanted to do my best to comfort and console you; for I thought it would be a satisfaction to a wife to know that at all events she had a husband who was no coward—for you have it to say, that at least your husband is greater than his destiny."

Marie Louise was silent.

"So let us talk reasonably together, my dearest; perhaps that will be better for you than my attempts at consolation. Have you seen after all the linen and bed furniture, so as to have it in order? If you have old table linen, let it be well mangled—which conceals the imperfection, so that it sells as well as new, according to Pellander."

"I will do what is necessary," sighed Marie Louise.

"That I am convinced of. Let all the stores, too, be brought out from the closets and cupboards; such things often fetch a great deal of money. They can be sold out there in the court-yard, where, after Pellander's wise counsel, brandy will be distributed to the country people."

'Alas!" said Marie Louise.

"My love, we must, during these two years of probation, set aside all unnecessary anxieties. Let us see therefore what is to be done besides. You will have these hangings taken down—in these times, one can do without silk bed-curtains and mahogany bedsteads. Can we not have the old painted four-post bedstead brought down from the garret, in which Papa Malcolm slumbered so sweetly when he returned from his oxen expeditions? The departed Malcolm could ——"

"Ah, be silent, Walden."

"I beg of you, dear Marie Louise, to look upon my reminiscences as the best intentioned possible. It is as well, however, that you should furnish your bedroom at once, so that it may seem as if one set of things had been used instead of the other during the time of the auction—do you not think so yourself? As to the other rooms, they may as well remain as they are, since they can be easily inspected. The moveable articles can be carried, however, to the great saloon."

"Yes, yes; only leave me now in peace. I have Monday and Tuesday before me for these preparations."

"But that is but a short time for so much that has to be done; besides, to celebrate the last evening on which we can see guests here, I have invited a couple of old friends, who happen to be in the neighborhood. They will help me to bear up under this trouble."

"You surely would not wish to play at cards this evening? No, you surely cannot wish that."

"Oh, why not? I can do it all the more quietly since I have not a couple of dollars to lose. In future, I must be content to chalk my scores."

"Which in their time will be debts which must be paid. Ah, Walden! will you never learn to put a restraint on yourself?"

"Whenever it is necessary I can always restrain myself. But I consider that it *will be an honor to* me if I can sit down to-*day with as much* presence of mind and pleasure to the card-table as I did two years ago."

"You would, perhaps, be able to play even on the day of the sale?"

"Yes, what else should I have to do? These gentlemen, too, who will stay all night, must be amused in some way or other, and a rubber is the least that we can offer them."

Marie Louise had heard enough. She pleaded that she had orders to give for the expected guests, and left the room.

* * * * *

The day appointed for the sale, and which had been looked forward to with painful anxiety, came at last. The first sound that awakened Marie Louise from a short slumber, was the rattling of Pellander's chaise over the stones of the court-yard, and soon after was heard his voice, giving, in every direction, the necessary orders.

After a short but fervent prayer, Marie Louise left her couch, that was literally now the unpretending bed of her deceased uncle Malcolm, and after having again and again kissed her little son, and supplied him with all she could think of to quiet and amuse him, she left him to the care of his nurse, and went to her mother's room. She received and returned her mother's affectionate embrace, but no tears came to her eyes, no lamentations passed her lips. "I must be strong to-day," she said, "otherwise I should despise myself. I have worked out my own destiny, and have no right to complain."

She entered the saloon; it was converted into one large warehouse of goods, and in the midst of piles of bedding, house-linen, china, and household utensils of every description, was Pellander, with a roll of paper in one hand and a pen in the other, walking up and down.

"Your servant, your servant, my good lady! I am just now busy, in accordance with my duty, numbering all these things. A most unpleasant affair, it must be said! Upon my honor, I never expected anything of this kind when we met at the death-bed of my deceased patron, and I had the honor, as you well remember—but excuse me for speaking so freely."

"It matters not! I came here, however, because I have a little business to transact with Mr. Pellander."

"Much flattered by your confidence, my good lady! About what may it be?"

"Among the gold ornaments——"

"Aha! my good lady," interrupted Pellander, as if he feared to hear more, "that will be impossible! It is my duty to see that not one of the things on my list is set aside, as I am answerable for everything. Yet ladies cannot understand such matters, that is quite natural."

"Oh yes, I understand perfectly; but, Mr. Pellander, you have quite misunderstood my meaning. I wished to say only, that amongst these ornaments is a gold snuff-box; that one there with a large topaz on the lid. Be so good as to buy it in yourself, at the lowest price possible, as if you had received a commission for it. It is particularly valuable to me, because it came from a dear friend who is dead, and whose name is inscribed in it—and be assured that I will do all in my power to redeem it from you as soon as possible."

"My good lady, my good lady!—you must be well aware that it is my duty to let it go for the highest possible price. It is so beautiful and costly, that we shall get a great deal for it, and as to your request that I should advance the money, really——"

"Oh, my good Mr. Pellander, do not be so hard! I will, most assuredly, repay you—believe in my word!"

"I believe firmly in your good will, my lady, but I doubt much whether you will have money enough left to reclaim the box."

"Oh, indeed, I shall have still money from the produce of my garden and the sale of my milk! Call to mind the little service that my husband was so happy as to be able to do you, when you yourself were in difficulties."

"What was that?" asked Pellander, opening his eyes wide in astonishment. "When can that have occurred? Will you be so good, my lady, as to explain yourself more fully? Really I remember nothing of the kind—but something quite the reverse."

"Ah, it was only a trifle—I mean only the security for a bond."

"Most certainly a misunderstanding on your part, my lady; for I can say that, for at least fifteen years, my affairs have, thank God, through prudent management, been in such good order, that I have had neither to give bonds nor make loans, but on the contrary, have been able, as was my duty, to assist others with my credit."

"Ah, now I remember," said Marie Louise, hesitating, as this fresh proof of the meanness of her husband gave a pang to her heart; "*it must have been quite* another person—excuse me. My head is sadly confused to-day."

"That is no wonder," said Pellander, as he proceeded with his business. Number 245, 246——"

Marie Louise was about to leave the room, when Pellander's heart, touched by the sight of her quiet resignation, began to give way from the principle he had always maintained, of considering the interests of others after his own. "Listen, my good lady," said he, scratching with his pen behind his ear. "I will think of some plan about the snuff-box. Bless my soul! that I will; but it must remain in my possession until—you understand me, my good lady?"

"Perfectly, my good Mr. Pellander; with the greatest thankfulness I will, as soon as possible pay my debt;" and after casting a look around upon all the things with which she was so familiarly acquainted, and which she had at one time considered as a lasting possession, she hastened away to seek, in the various household occupations which were connected with the day, a distraction to her thoughts.

Marie Louise, with her mother and child, had been invited to the house of one of her wealthy friends in the neighborhood, during these days of hard trial; but she had preferred being present while the work of desolation was going on, and thus gradually to accustom herself to it, rather than to have to return home to an empty house. She had however, perhaps, reckoned too much upon her strength, for the sound of the first blow of the hammer, as it resounded through the room into which she had retired, found a painful echo in her trembling heart. She sank into a chair and then rose again, as if ashamed of her weakness. Was it, then, anything more than the loss of some worldly goods which for four years only she had possessed? During her whole previous life had she not been acquainted with poverty and want? Why should she now tremble? Sacred ties, her child, her mother, her duties as a wife, all these remained, and all demanded that every querulous feeling, every nervous weakness, should be laid aside, and strength, both of body and mind, preserved for the three-fold obligations of the future.

A crowd of people from the town, or rather the whole of its *genteel* population, with the exception of the Utters and their household guest, were present at the auction. Each one congratulated himself that at last they were free to wander about as they liked, and to disperse themselves into every corner of the noble mansion, whilst they pinched each other's arms, and whispered to each other the most *piquant* observations about, for example, "Pride having a fall, and bringing always its own punishment," &c. &c., which remarks were all the more appropriate, since the pride imputed to the lady was evidently in no respects subdued, for instead of receiving their visits with thankfulness, which might have been expected, the lady of the house caused it to be announced that she could see no one. They did not fail, too, to call up many a remembrance of the time when the "beauty of the bow-window" had given herself the airs of a countess, and lived like a queen, which was but the old story of the "raven in borrowed plumes."

Many people also came from the surrounding country houses; and the noise and bustle, the heat and discomfort, were felt all over the house. Marie Louise with her child took refuge in the remote apartment which was occupied by her mother, where her husband soon found her out to whisper a few words in her ear: "May I beg of you, my dear," said the exemplary husband, "that you will have a little table set out for six—with cold meat, or whatever you happen to have—in the blue parlor? It is the only corner in the whole house where one does not run a chance of being deafened with the noise."

"And can you really think of quiet or comfort at such a moment? Are you quite without feeling?"

"Feeling, my dear, ought never to be shown, on such occasions, by people who know anything of life. Next month, perhaps, or even sooner, we may be going to an auction at the house of some of our friends, when their turn comes, to purchase furniture for ourselves again. Such things pass from hand to hand, and do not deserve that we should show any feeling about them."

"And when will you show feeling about anything?" asked Marie Louise, with tears in her eyes, which the levity of her husband, rather than her own troubles, drew from her.

"When? Oh, such an occasion may come yet; for instance, if I were to lose you. Then I would allow my feelings to master me, for I certainly should not be able to have command over myself."

Marie Louise was surprised at these words, which she had not expected, and returned the pressure of the hand which accompanied them with a feeling of gratitude. But the impression soon vanished, when Walden, as he went out at the door, repeated—"At nine o'clock, in the blue parlor, dear Marie Louise. You need not give yourself much trouble about it."

Mrs. N—— cast a stolen glance at her daughter. She saw that this scene had no favorable effect on Marie Louise. "Think of your little one, and take courage for his sake," entreated the tender mother. "He will one day repay you for all your present trials, if you can only pass through them as praiseworthily as you have begun."

"Alas!" sighed Marie Louise, "perhaps he, too, will be one day the same."

"No. God is good. He hears your prayers and sees your sufferings, my poor child."

"But he is also just," answered Marie Louise, in a subdued voice, as she took her boy in her arms and pressed him close to her heart.

A thundering blow of the hammer, followed by Pellander's voice, broke the silence that ensued.

CHAPTER XXIV.

> Now comes the autumn hours,
> The sun it flies,
> The storm-winds rise,
> And mine eyes weep
> O'er mem'ry's faded flow'rs.
>
> STAGNELIUS.

THE auction, with its bustle and painful discords, was over.

It was not the day of the sale, however, with all the disagreeable circumstances that we have described, which formed the worst part of this crisis in their fate. Painful days followed, in which, out of the dirty and disordered rooms, one thing after another was carried out; things with which the fondest remembrances were connected, handled by rough and indifferent hands, and thrown on to carts, and which, from behind window-curtains, were seen to drive away, to be unpacked again at the houses of persons as indifferent as their messengers. Yes, bitter were the days, when wandering through the great house, now empty and bare, the eye must seek out to find here and there a chair or a table, or an old sofa, which had been brought out from the lofts and lumber-rooms, and which now, like invalids, leaned for support against the deserted walls. To wander through these rooms, where the echo of their footsteps was heard; to sit down to a table furnished with coarse and ill-matched porcelain, and where a number of missing articles reminded them that it would be long before they were replaced;—all this belonged, it is true, only to the minor evils of their position, and ought, perhaps, scarcely to be mentioned with others so much more serious; but they were annoying, and served daily and hourly to recall to mind altered circumstances and changed fortunes.

Marie Louise was weary, and suffering both in mind and body; but she was determined to be strong, and she was so. With the duties of a mother and wife to fulfil, she had shuddered at the thought of actual poverty, and how was she to behold it approach with giant strides. How she bore up beneath her burthen in hours of solitude, when alone the all-seeing eye was upon her, that no one knows; but before her family she maintained a calm exterior, and a more self-possessed manner than she had formerly shown; but no one ever saw a smile hover for a moment round her lips.

Von Walden, who for a couple of days endured the most painful trial that he knew upon earth—that of being left to solitude and his own company, said to his wife, on the third day: "As I see it is impossible for me to induce you to take a more cheerful view of life and its little events, I really believe, that were you to be left to yourself, your thoughts and feelings would be more calm; so that I am thinking of leaving you for a week or ten days—some friends of mine, besides, wish to see me."

"You would go from home, and leave us now?" said Marie Louise, painfully surprised, for this she had not expected.

"What can I do, my dear? You place too little value on my company for it to have any influence on your spirits; and as for me, you are well aware that I only like to see cheerful faces."

"Alas! can I look cheerful—can I forget all that has passed in the last few weeks? Can you expect that of me?"

"I expect nothing, my dear. Make this a principle yourself, too, and you will find life, altogether, pass more easily. But be of good *cheer now, dear Marie* Louise, and have the kindness to prepare me a little linen. I have fixed to set off at four o'clock."

"My good Walden, let me say to you that it is high time to lay aside all levity, and, above all, this passion for play which has so ruined us. Alter your habits of life, I conjure you, in mine and your child's name, and for the sake of your own honor! Will you not dismiss the steward, and begin to look after your own concerns? You would then find a satisfactory and worthy occupation, and other amusements would become unnecessary."

"I have no doubt of that. But as I have no practical acquaintance with farming, the steward must remain until I have acquired it. This kind of knowledge, however, is not to be learned like a lesson; so there is nothing to prevent my being absent now and then."

Marie Louise sighed.

Von Walden left home. Not this time alone, but from time to time he made long journeys.

During the summer, the time passed almost tolerably pleasant; but autumn came. Long and stormy evenings came, and Marie Louise sat constantly alone with her mother and child, seeking a refuge from her gloomy and painful thoughts in household occupations, and the fulfilment of herduties. It became winter, and the snow lay deep in the great avenue which led up to Malcolm's-Ness. No sledges approached the house, no horses neighed, no bells rang; all was still as the grave. And more and more rare became the times when Von Walden returned for a couple of days, to give false and boastful accounts of the different ways that, in town and country, he had made efforts to improve their circumstances. On one occasion, he would relate that his prospects were so completely brightened, that he was on the point of receiving a very considerable sum of money; but the next time he came, an unforeseen event had prevented the development of his plans, so that they were, of course, for a time deferred.

Long was it a mystery to Marie Louise, how, on these constant journeys, he contrived to live; as she very well knew that Pellånder had left none of the proceeds of the sale in his hands. With horror, she at last discovered that he had sold the greater part of the grain which had been reserved for their winter provision; so that, by the new year, they would be without corn.

It would, however, be as useless as it would be wearisome, to follow, step by step, all the details of the circumstances which united in bringing about their total ruin.

After Van Walden had for some time gone about professing to "arrange his affairs," and only entangling himself still more in the net from which it was impossible for him to extricate himself, his creditors had increased in number like locusts in the desert, and fell upon him now with relentless fury. For one year only after his return from their travels, Von Walden retained the name and dignity of possessor of Malcolm's-Ness; but at the end of this time he left it, in a manner which precluded the possibility of purchasing the smallest piece of land in exchange.

At a military station, which was about three miles distant from the handsome domain of Malcolm's-Ness, and deep in the forest, Von Walden got at last the lease of a small farmhouse, with paddock and small potato ground.

A comfortless, ill-built, old-fashioned cottage, with slanting roof, small lattice-windows, and whitewashed walls, through which the autumn and winter wind found entrance at many a chink; one should have seen such a tenement, or rather lived in it for a month, the better to understand the feelings of Marie Louise as she arrived one gloomy autumn evening at this home which had been provided for her.

A kind, but invisible friend, however, who was in communication with the person who had left the dwelling to them, had in secret arranged that its conditions should be improved, in many respects, before the family came to take possession. A store of fire-wood was provided, and the peasants who were to be their neighbors, and from whom Von Walden had already procured many things on credit, did not display as much want of courtesy as they might have done.

The first sight of their new dwelling took from Marie Louise the last remains of courage that had supported her, as, with her mother and child, she left Malcolm's-Ness, and parted, as it would seem, with the last traces of all the comforts and luxuries of refined life.

Von Walden had left some days previous, to put things in order, and to be ready to receive them. As they entered what might be called the parlor, a feeling of chill dampness struck them, in spite of the fire that was burning in the smoky chimney. The only servant which they had retained, a faithful old woman, who had been sent to prepare for them, now received them with low curtsies, and with tears in her eyes, as she saw her beautiful mistress—her "lady baroness"—alight in the simple dress which she had now assumed, that the contrast might not be too striking.

"Where is my husband?" asked Marie Louise, as she busied herself in taking off her child's things, and looked in the fire—not having courage to look around her.

"Well, my good lady must not be angry," answered old Johanna, "but when my master, the lieutenant, came to see about the place, he got so restless that he could not be still a moment; so, 'Listen, Johanna,' said he, 'you see I can do nothing here, so I will just write a couple of lines to your lady, for I must go away on some important business;' and he wrote this and left me."

"That is right," said Marie Louise, with difficulty suppressing her tears. "Go, good Johanna, and get us a little tea ready. Make it right good and hot; and in the mean time I will get a little settled here."

Johanna went out, but could not forbear taking a look through the great key-hole after the door was shut. What did she see? She saw how her young mistress threw herself into her mother's arms, who pressed her in silence to her bosom, whilst the child falling over some unevenness in the floor, began to cry and call after its mamma.

"This is life!—this is poetry!" cried Marie Louise, with bitter irony, as she raised the child and quieted him with caresses. "Ah, mamma, my fate is now indeed decided. See here"—and she held the unopened note before the light of the fire—"can anything be imagined more frightful than this moment? To be forsaken by him to whom I sacrificed everything!"

"He is not worth your regrets or your sorrow, my child. But think now what I myself must have suffered, who foresaw all this, when you, dearest, my hope, my all, took the first step which led to this sad conclusion. Since then, I have always been prepared for the worst, and now I pray from my inmost soul that Marie Louise may not sink under her trials—for then should I indeed be unhappy."

"No, mamma, I will not sink under them. I must not. But we will see what he writes," and she broke open the note.

"My dearest Marie Louise,—I hope that you will find that I have done everything that circumstances would allow, to provide for your comfort. I thought it my duty not to leave you at this painful moment without having given some assistance, which, perhaps, other men in their despair might have forgotten. Now, I feel it is more than I can stand to receive you here. A meeting at this moment would only be painful to both; and to spare you this unpleasantness, I have chosen this time for settling a little business. I shall not be more than three days absent. Meantime, I wish you a good night's rest after your ride, my dear friend, and in the hope that I shall have given you satisfaction, I beg you to believe me,

"Your faithful
"WALDEN."

When Marie Louise had read the note she threw it into the flames, with an expression which left no doubt of the kind of impression it had made.

"You might have expected this from him, my child, and have no reason to be surprised at it."

"I am not surprised," answered Marie Louise, in a tone unnaturally calm; "I should only like to know how it will all end."

"God disposes all—let this thought calm your fears, and turn to Him! But we will now see a little how we can best arrange ourselves here. See, my love, it is altogether better than we might have expected from the description. The walls are a bright cheerful color, are they not?"

"And this furniture that used to stand in the steward's room, looks quite grand; almost too elegant for our new parlor—or stay, how ought we to call it?—our saloon, drawing-room, or reception-room?"

"Not this tone, Marie Louise," said her mother, reproachfully; "whom the Lord chasteneth, should be lowly in heart. We will call this room the parlor, as our predecessors have done, and as our best things stand here, we will consider it our best room, in which we may pass our time, at least in peace, so long as we have peace in our own consciences."

Marie Louise pressed gently her mother's hand, "Ah!" sighed she, "when shall I ever be like mamma?"

"When God has tried thee enough, my child!"

Whilst this was going on in the parlor, Johanna was without in her little room, from which a door led into the bed-room, (the cottage contained three rooms besides that of Johanna,) and she blew the fire under the slowly boiling tea-kettle. Whilst she was so occupied, the latch of the opposite door was gently raised, and a voice whispered from the opening: "Johanna, are they still in the parlor?"

"Yes, come in! If they should come, we shall hear them well enough; but they were so full of trouble, that they are not likely to be in a hurry."

"Indeed—they were in great trouble—that I can well believe!" A man, wrapped in a mantle, stepped softly in. "I only want just to take a look, to see that all is right." And he—we know well who it was—opened the door to the sleeping apartment, where a fire was burning, and threw its light upon a well-supplied tea-table, which stood before a convenient little sofa. This had been provided by one of the lieutenant's new neighbors, who had received a commission from him to purchase it, together with the six chairs to match, which Von Walden had eagerly taken from him, with the promise that they should be paid for in six months. These were to be as unexpected a surprise to his wife as the desk, the work-table, and toilette-glass, which he had procured from other people in the same manner. The tea-service, however, which had formerly belonged to them at Malcolm's-Ness, had been brought after the departure of the lieutenant, and Johanna had been instructed to give her young mistress a hint that it had come from one of the gentlemen's houses in the neighborhood.

The person who had done this in secret, now entered the room quietly, and lighting the candle which stood on the table, cast a furtive look around him, and unperceived by Johanna, laid something wrapped in paper on the dressing-table. But at this moment the door opened of the room between the parlor and bed-room, and Williamson (for it was he) heard the voice of Mrs. N——, saying: "Dear me, I shall be quite comfortable here, my child—I never should have expected that Walden would have thought of me."

"That he certainly would not have done," thought Williamson, and retreated quickly into the outer room, where he made a sign of farewell to his secret confidante, the old Johanna, who, during the absence of Von Walden and Marie Louise, had, at his recommendation, gone into the service of Mrs. N——.

"Good heavens! what does this mean?" cried Marie Louise, as she entered the bedroom, and with a sort of vague and tender foreboding seemed as if she felt the influence of a sympathizing spirit. "See, mamma; if this is Walden's doing, and it cannot be any one else, I ought to be very, very thankful. I never expected to see again such a comfortable sofa, and these flowers, that I was always so fond of!" and as she bent over them, a tear fell into the corolla of the finest of them. The heart of Marie Louise could not be mistaken.

Mrs. N—— did not doubt for a second; but when Johanna came in soon after, and related with glistening eyes, that the lieutenant had purchased all these things, with the exception of the tea-service, which she thought came from Wallby, in order to give pleasure to her mistress, the two ladies thought it more wonderful than ever, and the surprise and talk that it excited caused them to feel less bitterly that first impression.

The tea tasted so good out of the old well-known cups! Marie Louise, whose spirits rose in a manner to her quite unaccountable, began to discuss with her mother their future manner of life, and to talk of the work which she meant to undertake; declaring that, even in poverty, they might be happy, if Walden would but remain at home, and conquer his old propensity for play, which now he would at least have no materials for.

The first evening in their new home thus passed better than they could have ventured to hope, and it was only after having parted with her mother, and put her child to rest, that Marie Louise perceived the little packet on her dressing table. Without suspecting the nature of its contents she unfolded the paper; but she started as she found within it the valuable present and keepsake of the Baroness Charlotte—the gold snuff-box which she had commissioned Pellander to purchase at the sale, but which she had never been able to redeem. She lifted up the lid and found within it the following note:

"Respected lady!—In consideration for the sad occurrences which have lately taken place, and by which your heart must be much grieved, I take the liberty, as your devoted servant and friend, to remind you of a little transaction which took place between us. The *very beautiful* and sensible behavior which *you showed*, my good lady, on an occasion that I need not mention inspired me with the greatest respect for your ladyship's disposition and reason, which feeling has since been so strengthened, that as a proof that we advocates have also a sense like others of what is good and right, I do myself the honor of sending the accompanying box as a present, as well as a token of my gratitude for the confidence with which your ladyship honored me on a certain occasion.

"With much respect,
"Your obedient Servant,
"JOSIAS PELLANDER."

"Ah, my foreboding, my foreboding." said Marie Louise to herself, as she pressed the recovered treasure, now dearer than ever, to her lips. There was but one person who could have brought it here: for the letter, what could that mean? It was merely a subterfuge to conceal the real donor. And he who had done this, had also understood how to contrive all the rest so delicately, that she should only have her husband to thank for it. Oh, there was something so strange in the thought, that he who had once been so near her heart, had now thought of her, and cared and watched over her well-being and comfort—this she had never deserved! But it was also a sweet feeling, for Marie Louise was certain that he who had in secret shown so much foresight and care, and had also displayed so much delicacy, would never for a moment cause her uneasiness; and yet while he would not seek to come in personal contact with her, she felt sure he would never quite lose sight of her.

This conviction inspired her with courage, and enabled her to put forth all her strength to bear the destiny which she had brought on herself. Far from dwelling on the remembrance of Williamson with any feelings that were at variance with her duty as a wife, she now thought of him in a point of view, that gave peace rather than disquietude to her heart.

The power of a passion, such as she had formerly felt, lay bound beneath the hard and constant burden of household cares, and the thoughts of Marie Louise on him, who, in former times had been so dear to her, and who still was so, were so pure, that she now would have seen and spoken to him without an embarrassed feeling, without agitation or disquiet, if she had not feared to make herself the object of slander. Her fame was now the only thing left her, and must therefore be more than ever carefully preserved.

* * * * *

After the lapse of a week, Von Walden came back from a large market which had been held in the neighborhood, where he had, as he called it, "arranged his affairs," and bringing with him, it is true, a sum of money that he had persuaded Pellander to give him out of the little that remained from the sale of Malcolm's-Ness, and although he presented a sad, and, in every respect, pitiful appearance, he was received by Marie Louise with cheerfulness, and even with pleasure, and he was full of self-satisfaction, as she thanked him for all the attentions that he had surprised her with on her arrival.

"Yes, it is my way to mix up good with bad," said he; and wet and dirty as he was—for now his only equipage was a post cart—he threw himself at full length upon the nice sofa; "you, my dear," continued he, "parted from me with a gloomy face, when I came here to put things in order, and I was determined to brighten it up again—that was all."

"And you were able to purchase all these things, my good Walden? I cannot understand ——"

"Able to purchase them! Such trifles, my dear? I had long before described and ordered them; but I did not want to tell my little secret until you came here. By and by, when I have settled all my affairs, which, I have every reason to think, will be very soon, you will see that I shall also get furniture for the child's room. But what have you to give me to eat? I am as hungry as a wolf; for, between ourselves, I had not anything in my pocket to-day, to get anything with. I had, to be sure, a little money, that I got from Pellander, out of our remaining effects; but I met with a poor wretch, who was worse off than myself, and could not resist giving him my last farthing."

"My poor Walden!"

"No lamentations, my dear. A man ought to know how to suit himself to bad as well as fine weather. If it rain good luck, he may put away his umbrella, and let it beat in his face; but if misfortune comes down, he seizes it again, and takes care that they do not come through; but when he is tired of carrying it, may let it fall in the mud, and tread it under foot. Such a man am I—but something to eat, something to eat; that is the principal thing."

And that was, truly, always the principal thing, when Walden was at home. But who can tell how he managed to live whilst he was absent, which was constantly the case. It was, at first, beyond the power of Marie Louise to solve this riddle; and all her entreaties that he would confide in her, had as little effect as her representations of th enecessity for his remaining at home. But, at last, many reports came to her ears, which bitterly pained the feelings of the unhappy wife. It was said that Lieutenant von Walden not merely frequented the most disreputable houses, where nothing but card-playing and spirit-drinking went on, but that he associated with the worst kind of company, now that he could no longer play with his old friends.

The mortification which he felt at this separation from his old comrades, and perhaps, also, the knowledge of the misery into which he had thrown his family, was followed by the indulgence of a new and as powerful a propensity as that of gaming; and before six months were over, Von Walden, who a few years before had been admired and sought for, was not only dismissed from his regiment, but was looked upon as for ever lost to society. Besotted and disfigured, and half-stupified by his debauched habits, he retained sufficient capacity only to incur debts at the cost of his few remaining resources.

One day, as Marie Louise, in tears, was endeavoring to calm to sleep her little son, who, ill and restless, filled her ear and heart with its faint moans, she heard, with surprise, the strange footsteps of a man before the window. In raising her head, she perceived a man in a blue coat and white buttons, a costume that she knew belonged to officers of justice. She had before seen such a person in the neighborhood of the cottage, and had felt a foreboding of the meaning of his presence. Shuddering at the thought that she might have to find herself still more miserable, she rose and opened the door. Her foreboding heart had not deceived her; it was indeed a bailiff, who, followed by two constables, came to put a distraint upon the whole of the little property which was left them.

"It is impossible," said Marie Louise; "it must be a mistake!"

"I would it were so," answered the officer, compassionately. "But, see you, this paper speaks very plainly. These things here must all be sold by auction."

And it really came to this, for it was spring, and Marie Louise's guardian angel was absent! and was not aware of these late proceedings of Von Walden, which were all the more unexpected, from Williamson having only a short time before, through Pellander, extricated him from some pressing difficulties, and could not anticipate so soon any more such dilemmas.

Another change came.

Von Walden's health could no longer resist the many inroads made upon it by his intemperance. He became seriously ill, and was confined for some time to his bed.

This epoch was the heaviest and hardest to bear that Marie had yet experienced in her life, when, for the second time, the costly present of two friends was obliged to be disposed of, not only for the comforts required for the sick bed, but in order to buy bread for her family; for now it became impossible to attempt to employ herself in working for strangers. Her good mother, whom God had spared to her as a support and consolation in her sorrow, was too weak and sickly to assist her in her attendance through long nights of anguish by the side of the sick bed—nights in which she had time to remember her former conception of the height of misery. Formerly had she prophesied: "A hut in the country, reduced circumstances, want, poverty, and love grown cold——" Alas! this picture of wretchedness was light, compared to that which was now before her. Marie Louise had forgotten to include in it a sick husband in a fever, who now cursed and sang, now cried and laughed, and a child, an only and beloved child, who, long ailing, was now laid upon its bed of suffering.

In Marie Louise's crushed heart was, as we have already noticed, no room left for the storm of earthly passion. With delight would she, in these nights, have bent her knees in thankfulness to have had a being near her who, understanding and sympathizing in her sorrow, would have helped her to bear its burthen—yes, were it even Williamson, Williamson as friend and brother! "Oh, would to God that he were come!"

But he came not; he was far away; and to strangers she could not apply for pity, help, and love.

It was one night towards the end of summer, a gloomy and rainy night, but still a summer's night, with its mysterious half-darkness. In one bed lay Walden, with face red and swollen, in wild delirium, which turned ever upon his old favorite subject and habit. He lost and won, and spoke with himself in such a manner as to excite as much horror as pity in those who heard him. Marie Louise, still dressed, sat with her child in her arms on her own bed, and, drowsy, and unable any longer to keep awake, her head had sunk upon the pillow. The old Johanna sat nodding on a stool at the fire-side.

Marie Louise dreamed. She was so happy, and, beyond all description, so blessed! It seemed to her as if she was busied in adorning herself with ornaments, and that she knew that the child, for whom her heart had so often beat, and for whom she had heaved so many a sigh, and wept so many hot tears, was now raised above all earthly sorrow. Then, starting from her sleep, her first thought on waking was, "My God! my God! can this dream be already true? Can God have taken him from me as I slept?" and in anguish she listened for his faint breathing. Oh! only a mother can so listen, can so strain the sense of hearing! Her heart was ready to break with despair, until the boy softly whispered: "Mamma!" What sweet influence lay in that single word! Again was the light and peace of blessedness in the heart of the young mother. How great, how merciful, how good is God! He had designed to show her what a frightful fate might still await her. In unspeakable thankfulness, she cast her eyes to heaven, and pressed the child to her heart.

Strengthened by the short slumber which she had had, and the mystical influence which the past hour had shed, Marie Louise arose, and with her light burthen in her arms, went to watch by the bed of her husband. Walden's fantasies were at last quieted by the effect of a composing draught that he had taken, and he now lay in a deep sleep. For some moments Marie Louise stood in silent prayer for them all; then, sitting down by the window, began to sing the favorite cradle-song of her child, with which he was so quickly sent to sleep.

The sun began gradually to gild the tops of the forest trees; the morning light came into the room, and as Marie Louise contemplated the pale and emaciated features of the being to whom she had given life, and who was soon to enter on a truer life, she felt that her heart needed strength. She not only felt it, but she said to herself, "God's will be done!" And yet it seemed as if the last chord of the poor mother's heart must break, as the child suddenly, and in an unusual and strange manner, began to stretch out its arms. She did not understand the movement, but she foreboded something frightful, and waking Johanna and her mother with her cry of alarm, they soon stood by her side, to share in her fears.

"See, dearest mamma! how his color is changed! How his little hand is clenched! My child, my child, answer me, speak to me!"

The little one gave no answer; he endeavored to articulate the one sweet word that he had learnt, the word mamma! but it died on his pale lips. His eyes were raised to cast one more look of love upon his mother, before the return of the fit extinguished the last faint spark of life.

Now shone the sun high in the heavens, and cast its rosy light over the pale and motionless mother, and over the pale child which lay on her bosom, and, shaded by her long tresses, slept the sleep of peace. A light wind murmured through the branches of the trees. The blackbird warbled its morning song before the window. The old mother lay on her knees in prayer to God.

The husband raised himself up in bed. He rubbed his eyes, and contemplated with a fixed gaze the scene before him, then, becoming gradually enlightened by the light of consciousness, he clasped his hands and hid his face; but he could not hide himself from before his stricken conscience.

CHAPTER XXV.

> Where is peace?
> There where our spirits rest
> From time and space.
> LING.

AGAIN weeks passed away upon the flood of time. Soon had Marie Louise learnt to perceive that her dream on that eventful night had been a messenger of peace, to prepare her mind for the shock it was to sustain, and now that she knew that her child was removed from all suffering, and safe from all storms, and was conscious that she had fulfilled as far as possible all the duties of a mother she devoted herself with redoubled zeal to those which remained to her.

Walden's condition, after being long precarious, began at last to improve; and during this *time Marie Louise* unceasingly exerted all her tenderness and loving persuasion to lead him back to a better life, and whole hours would she talk with him, and exert every power of eloquence with this holy motive.

"You are well now," said she, laying her own kindly upon his emaciated hand, "and I need no longer, alas! devote so much of my time to my duties as a mother; I can work with double industry, and have strength for it. We could rent a part of the land belonging to this place, and with a couple of day laborers easily cultivate it, and you would see that God would bless our undertaking, and let his sun again smile upon us."

Walden shook his head with a doubting expression. He could no longer build airy castles; the time, too, for levity and boasting was over, but with it had gone all energy of mind to bring forth better fruit. He was spiritless and dejected, inwardly dead to all interests and feelings, although the body was reviving.

"Only answer me, dear friend! I should be so glad, so happy, if my proposed plan were to cheer you. What is all the past, but a course of trial that God thought fit to send us? It is now at an end; I feel it in the freedom with which I breath again, and in my health, which in spite of all my trials is still good."

Whilst Marie Louise endeavored thus to console her husband, she was plying the needle dexterously and weariedly as formerly, upon fine linen and muslin, that she embroidered for a rich farmer's wife in the neighborhood.

"You are very good, as you have always been," sighed he; "but neither now nor ever have I deserved your care. I was a wretch! —do you understand me?—a wretch! Ha! you do not know what it is to be constantly pursued by the remembrance of one's errors, and thrown back upon one's fancies. I am better, it is true; but no more happiness for me!"

"O yes, my dear beloved friend! much happiness is in store for you. These tears upon my cheek are tears of joy. I have no more tears of sorrow, since you have spoken these words."

"My poor wife! this is only a delusion."

"No, by Heavens, it is not! I am now happier than I was in the time of our most brilliant prosperity. You are now, I feel convinced, cured of your unfortunate passion;

and now you must only recover your spirits, which will come when the strength of health will give you elasticity enough to chase away all gloomy fancies. Then all troubles will be over. We are both young, and we can enter upon a new career of activity. If my proposed scheme does not please you, we could remove to one of the larger towns, where you could give instruction in languages or music, and I could have pupils to learn fancy-work. You will always find in me, Walden, an encouraging companion. We will support and console each other; and, in want, learn better to know each other's hearts than before, in time of superfluity."

So did she speak with him, and so seek to encourage herself and him. Her noble efforts ought, indeed, to have been crowned with success.

With the return of autumn, Marie Louise, began to feel the influence of the invisible presence of a long-missed friend. Many of the circumstances around her were improved; but the great aim for which she lived and labored—the endeavor to restore Walden to himself and to his duties—was not accomplished. His dejection increased, in spite of all her efforts to chase it away; and now that he had again left his bed, he spent many hours of the day in wandering about, principally in the depth of the forest, where he felt most secure of being unobserved. But the constant anxiety of his wife would not permit her to leave him to himself. With inexpressibly tender words she reproached him for his cruelty in leaving her a prey to these fears.

"I entreat you, Marie Louise," he answered one day, with a wildness which yet had the expression of an earnest request, "leave me in peace, and cease these eternal entreaties and arguments. Look upon me as lost for ever, and leave me to my fate."

"Impossible! How can you desire that? You will yet return to yourself again."

"Never! Look at me well, my wife—look at this emaciated body, these sunken eyes, this thin hair, that is scarce sufficient to cover my head, in which so many idle thoughts have hovered; look at the dashing Lieutenant von Walden of former days in this shabby coat, his only coat, that he has not even a right to wear, and whose gold-braid is as tarnished as its owner's reputation;—and I ask you, Marie Louise, if you can believe that *he who has* experienced humiliations of a *thousand kinds*,—who has seen how old comrades have turned away their heads, as if they did not see him, because they must not greet him,—do you believe that he—this man who has disgraced himself by indulging his bad passions at the worst and lowest places—that he can return to a new life of useful activity? He cannot do it!"

"Yes, my dear husband, he can—and it would be the greatest of all victories. Then you would be more esteemed and honored than you ever have been.

"I am too weak!"

"This weakness can be overcome; for at this moment, when you are forsaken by the whole world, and whenever your own heart is deserting you, one friend is left to you, who ought to be more to you than all else that you have lost; and love, and prayers, and God himself will stand by you as supports against your weakness."

"Ah! tease me no more! Your love causes me more sorrow than all the rest—I beg of you, give up this attempt, it leads to nothing—let me go!"

And he went out as usual, and only when in the forest began to breathe with freedom. Then he would sit down and listen to the rushing of the stream, which echoed the noisy tumults in his soul; or he would force his way through the gloomy fir thickets, and penetrate far into their recesses until he found a spot lonely enough to give utterance to the voice of the troubled spirit within, which left him neither peace nor repose.

A thousand times in these lonely hours the thought of self-destruction would pass through his mind, as the only means of relief from all his sorrows; but the remembrance that he at least could spare his wife this shock—the most terrible of all—restrained his hand. Another, and perhaps a still more powerful influence restrained him. Von Walden's religious feelings had been awakened; he had looked, as it were, behind the curtain which hangs between time and eternity.

Marie Louise had at last guessed the subject of his gloomiest thoughts, and she suspected that only a tender regard for her had enabled him to struggle against it. And she trembled before the frightful possibility that this love might lose its power over his soul, and leave him a prey to the godless desire.

But the tragedy was hastening to its last act.

* * * * *

The short winter-day was drawing to a

close. Marie Louise turned to her spinning-wheel industriously, for since her embroidery no longer found a sale, she had had recourse to spinning. The old Johanna had just made up her fire, and Mrs. N—— sat knitting in silence, which was long unbroken.

"How long he stays out to-day! My poor Walden!" said at last Marie Louise, as she looked up at her mother. "What do you think, mamma—must not something have happened?"

"Oh no, my dear child do not make yourself uneasy. He scarcely ever comes home earlier than this, and yet he is sure to come."

"Yes, thank God, he always does," repeated the poor wife, to comfort herself and allay the anxiety which she could not help feeling. Yet had she not often had such forebodings and fears without any misfortune happening? She ought not this time to give way to faintheartedness.

"Is it very dark out of doors, Johanna?" asked she of the faithful old servant, who was working in the same room.

"Oh, it is not so very dark, dear lady. The moon shines a little, and by and by it will be brighter."

Again there was silence for a while.

"Good God, mamma, I am so uneasy. It has already struck five o'clock. He never staid out so late before. How hungry he must be."

"You are distressing yourself quite needlessly, my Marie Louise. This constant anticipation of misfortune, which your imagination so easily suggests, is an unfortunate habit, which prevents your enjoying a minute's ease. Exert your reason, my child."

"Have I not reason to be uneasy, my dear mother?"

"Not that I know—he has been out late before; and he will soon be here, I feel sure within myself."

"And I feel also sure within myself of something unusual, something dreadful, that I cannot understand nor control. But, good heavens! what was that light before the window? Did you not see it, mamma?"

"My dear child, you are really foolish. You will become quite superstitious. That was only the light of the fire on the glass—you are frightening yourself."

"Do you, then, not hear something, mamma? There is some one knocking at the door. What can it be? Hark, that is not *Walden's hand. But yet*, perhaps—who could it be? Make haste, dear Johanna, with the supper, that he may have something warm; that will do him good. He cannot, perhaps, find the latch, so hasten with the light and open the door. There is knocking again at the door. It is a stranger. It is not Walden. Oh God! I knew it well!"

Johanna hastened to the outer door.

Marie Louise could not from fear move from the spot, nor call her servant back again to say that all was now still without.

Mrs. N——, not much less alarmed than her daughter, tried to compose herself. "My dear child, what is there to fear? Even if it should be a stranger why should that alarm you?"

Marie Louise made a sign with her hand that her mother should listen. There was a whispering in Johanna's kitchen.

"I will go out," said Mrs. N——.

Marie Louise, in her agony, held her fast. A couple of painful minutes passed. But it became impossible to wait any longer; and overcoming by an effort the sort of paralysis of fear which prevented her moving her limbs, she tottered towards the door, and suddenly opened it.

Prepared for the worst, she saw only before her one of their neighbors, a good honest peasant, who seemed to be consulting with Johanna.

"My dear, good lady," said the man, "there is no time for delay, so I must tell you without any preamble, that I and one of my comrades, as we were bringing home wood to-day, have found Mr. Lieutenant, God knows, more dead than alive. It was dark, you see, and as he was leaving the forest, and had gone a little way from the path, he had fallen into the stone quarry near Arstapen. We heard him call, and soon found out where he was. But so injured was he with the stones that had fallen upon him, that we could not immediately carry him—"

"Where is he? Where is he then?" stammered out Marie Louise, deadly pale, and about to go out.

"Be easy, be easy, good lady! He will soon be here. He begged us to bring him here, as soon as he came a little to himself in our hut."

A couple of hours afterwards, when Walden had been brought home, and the doctor, who lived near, had been sent for, and had seen him, the latter said to Marie Louise, who had again recovered her self-possession, and was sitting by her husband's bed, watching him tenderly: "My good lady, I should only be deluding you with false hopes, if I said there was anything to be done in this case. Yet towards morning, if I am not deceived, he will return to consciousness again."

The doctor did not deceive himself.

Once again did a sparkle of life kindle in Walden's eyes and soul, although but feebly. "My breast, my head!" said he, faintly; "I thought it was only a bad dream, but now I feel it is a plain reality——God be thanked! all will now soon be over."

Seizing the hand of her husband, over which her tears streamed, Marie Louise said, with a deep and trembling voice: "No, my beloved husband, do not speak so! Have you remembered—have you taken thought on—" he understood her questioning look.

"Yes, I have thought; I have had time to think since my long illness, and since that night when, you will remember, I awoke and saw you with our dead child upon your lap. From that hour I have been changed, and have indeed taken thought, or there would have been long ago an end of me. I will have no secrets from you now. I have been often, often tempted to destroy myself; but when I thought on the trouble it would heap upon you—you to whom I had already caused so much,—my soul in this hour of temptation sought the Saviour whom I had so long forgotten. I found him, and he was more merciful to me than I deserved. But death was my great desire. It has come at last, and you, my Marie Louise, may now again be happy!"

Sobbing, Marie Louise bent over her husband, and sank upon her knees. She had no words for her emotion.

"If I was only not tortured by the remembrance," continued he, "that you, who were so happy in the possession of every thing, that you gave up so confidingly—that, through me, you have been brought step by step to the lowest want."

"Oh, my beloved husband, I have no right to complain, I enjoyed with you all that riches could give—ought I not be content to share poverty also with you? Dear husband, forget all that—or, if you cannot, take at least my inmost forgiveness — all — all is atoned for! And forgive me, also, if out of *thoughtlessness* I have ever grieved you."

These words seemed to fall with healing power on Walden's heart. He tried to thank her with a pressure of the hand, but could only express his gratitude with a look of love.

"Perhaps," said Marie Louise, with an inquiring glance, "perhaps you would like to see ——"

"No, it is not necessary; in the few minutes which are left to me, no one could make me better than I am. I believe, and let it be your comfort and consolation, that, in dying, I believe, and feel that even I may look for mercy. I have suffered a heavy punishment here below; but I can say no more, and I have said enough! Lay thy lips on mine, so that I may still feel thee near. Oh, that is sweet! And you have really forgiven me! You good one! Beg thy mother to forgive me too. I was thoughtless, my Marie Louise, but not quite bad. You saw through this, and had love enough to be willing to spend a whole life with me—if I could have become another man!"

"Oh, then I should have been blest!"

"But it is better as it is. Now my affairs are arranged, at last, in the best way," and here a faint smile played on his lips; "but it gets darker and darker before my eyes. Marie Louise, my tender, true, beloved wife, farewell! farewell! I die blessing thee."

And in a few minutes more all was over.

Marie Louise was a widow.

CHAPTER XXVI.

Upright they sit,
They council hold,
The good old dames.
SILFVERSTOLPE.

"THE Lord's will be done; what he does is ever for the best," said Mistress Utter, as she pushed away her coffee cup, and folded the letter up, in which the mother of Marie Louise announced the sad event which had ended her married life, and at the same time asked the advice of her old friend, with regard to their embarrassed circumstances.

"Yes, indeed, who can tell what would be the wisest thing to do?" said the old counsellor, and at the same time knocked the ashes out of his pipe so carelessly that some of them flew into the sugar basin: "Who knows what would be the wisest thing to do, mother?"

"Take care of the sugar, father, and let us say nothing until we read this letter from William, here. I think he has been long enough away at that place, where he was born; and it is high time he came home to look after the office. If I did not go in and out occasionally, there is no knowing what those fine gentlemen——"

"Oh! you are a most excellent body, mother, you look after everything. You understand even surveying business, and can keep these young men in order. But pour me out another cup. As this is Sunday afternoon, you ought to be liberal, mother; I will then read this letter of your favorite aloud."

The old woman smirked, and the old man began:—

"My dear good Aunt Gretchen!—I have now enjoyed as much happiness as I can hope for in this life. I have sat in my old mother's easy chair, and with feelings that she alone could awake in her beloved son have I read her remarks, written with her own hand on the fly leaves of her Bible; I sat there whole hours, and saw her old transparent face, with the pictures that were my delight as a child. Aunt Gretchen! I have even had a pinch of snuff out of her large old silver snuff-box, with the portrait of Gustavus III. on the lid. I have seen my friend, the friend of my youth, in his house that once belonged to my own parents. I have seen him happy with a good, dear, domestic wife, who is as simple and unpretending as the people around her. I was happy to find my old home become again the abode of happiness. And yet, with all this, I long to return again to the place that I now and for ever call my home. I long to see Aunt Gretchen—such coffee as hers even Augusta cannot make, and such good order in a bachelor's household no one but herself can preserve. I long to see my good old uncle, my respected friend, planting his flowers, as beautiful and luxuriant as Noah's vine; and in spite of the efforts which they make to detain me here, I shall return in about a fortnight after the arrival of this letter. My good Aunt Gretchen, make no preparations for me in my new house. You know that it has been an amusement to me whilst building and arranging it; but now the pleasure is over, and I am determined never to live anywhere but in my old apartments, my dear little bow-windowed room. Say nothing more on the subject. It may seem foolish to build a great house, and then to go on living in the house of other people—but let me have my way. I think of letting *my own. And now* no more. I am in a hurry, since I must go to a ball to-night, and whirl about with the young girls of the town. Who knows what may happen—but this is a stupid joke; Aunt Gretchen knows well that she is the only mistress that her little engineer will ever have over his house and heart.

"Greetings to my uncle, from
"Your faithful
"William Williamson."

"Yes, God bless my little engineer!" said the old lady, as she put the corner of her handkerchief to her eyes; "he is as good as gold, and we will have many a pinch of snuff together, though he is not such a good hand as I am at that art. As to his rooms, he must have his own way about it, although it is rather dull to live here where he has so little room for all his goods and chattels."

"He finds no one who makes him so comfortable as you, mother, that is the whole secret," said the old man.

"I very much doubt if that is the whole secret, father, for it is not so far, thank goodness, to the new house, but what I could keep everything in order for him—and have I not done it already for some time, though he fancied it was never so comfortable as the old accustomed place? I know no one in the town who has a handsomer house, or more beautiful furniture; for really they were as good as new when he bought them at the Malcolm's-Ness auction, and they have come to no harm here, for he only goes and looks at them, and I dust them, and air them constantly."

"Yes, indeed," said the counsellor, "you have really arranged everything there very elegant; but I do not exactly like it all, for one is like a stranger in one's own house, when one walks about such large rooms. He would have done better to nail some of them up."

"Ah, old man, young people have other notions and tastes to us. Those who belong to the world, want plenty of room, and we who keep out of it require very little. However, there are a couple of lovely rooms there; those which I call the wing-rooms; and these poor William loves with all his heart—yes, yes, I know well why he likes them so much."

"I know that too," rejoined the counsellor; "one of them looks into the new garden, that he, or rather I have laid out, since I have had a good share in it. And compared to that, the splendor in-doors is all nonsense to the flower-beds, grass-plats and espaliers, that I have produced. The apple, cherry, and plum trees that I have grafted for him, I will not say anything about; but I think the planting does me credit, mother."

"That it does, husband! But I do not think it is your flowers that make the room so dear to him. His liking has quite another foundation."

"I am quite curious to know what."

"But you shall not hear; only I rather think, that as the other wing-room looks to the street at the side of our house, he can see many things from it that he is accustomed to look at."

"Ah, you are very sharp-sighted, mother; just as you women are in general. But let us now say a word about the other, mother—shall we think about whether we could not let a couple of rooms to these poor ladies? From the letter of our old neighbor, one can see well, that they dread spending the winter in such solitude in that ugly place, and no one can be surprised at that. I really think that the people of the town have forgotten their affront at not being received on the day of the auction. I wish to believe it, but I am not certain."

"Oh, they will soon be reconciled," said Mistress Utter. "Lisa, my child, take away the coffee, and bring me my fur—my muff and tippet."

"Are you going out mother?"

"Yes, I will talk a little with the burgomaster's wife, and see what tune the bells play; for if I cannot succeed in arranging matters, so that they shall be well received, I shall advise them not to come here. Marie Louise, poor little thing, has had grief enough, and ought not now to have to find out that she is despised in the place that was formerly her home, and that people turn their backs upon her."

"Let any one dare to do that to my beautiful young lady of the bow-window," replied the counsellor. "If she has no other protector, I will become one to her."

"That is right and good, father. But we cannot [illegible] protect and defend her. She will want a hearty greeting, and the promise of work. For if she is merely to come and sit all alone in her room, and pass her time looking to see how politely people bend their necks as they pass, she had better stay where *she is—but let* me manage the matter; I will *soon set it to rights*. Lisa, never mind the fur—it is now warm enough without it, but bring the looking-glass and the pomade pot, and my cap with a brown ribbon."

After a hasty toilette, Mistress Utter repaired to the burgomaster's wife, with whom, quite accidentally, as the old lady had reckoned on, three other ladies were sitting—viz., the postmaster's wife, the doctor's wife, and the young wife of the clergyman.

"Hey day, Mistress Utter! What wind blows you here?" exclaimed the burgomaster's wife, advancing to meet her welcome guest.

"Yes, indeed," exclaimed the old lady; "it blows some particular wind always, when I go visiting. It is quite charming, ladies, that I should happen to meet you all here."

"What do you mean by that?" asked the postmaster's wife, and the Burgomaster's wife, both in one breath; whilst the doctor's wife and the parson's wife were too young to express their curiosity aloud, but contented themselves with looking significantly at each other.

"Well, then—but, first, may I take off my things?"

All hands were eagerly offered to assist the welcome bringer of a piece of news, and in a few minutes she sat on the sofa between the two elder ladies.

"Have you not heard any fatal accident?"

"No! Bless us, what can have happened?" and they began to guess the names of a number of persons who were either ill, or about to die, or who ought to die, in order to leave some expected office vacant.

"Nothing of that kind, my ladies. The person who has departed, has long ceased to be a member of our society, although he once belonged to this town."

A universal "Aha!" accompanied by an expressive gesture, seemed to announce that they were on the right scent.

"The individual can be no other," said the postmaster's wife, "than the crazy lieutenant, who, some years ago, married that proud young thing who lived opposite you in the bow-windowed room. Is he not?"

The postmaster's wife thought fit to have forgotten that the lieutenant had had the great honor of being related to the burgomaster's family. "Is it he?" said the others, looking at Mistress Utter.

"Yes, truly," said she. "But, my dear friend, why do you speak so strangely and unfriendly of an old acquaintance? Was she not once quite a favorite, and an ornament to our town?"

"What?" exclaimed the two younger ladies, "an ornament to our town! Mistress Utter surely deceives herself."

The burgomaster's wife, who, up to this time, had been silent, now spoke with great dignity. "My ladies, it is not to be denied that Mistress Utter, in one sense, is right. The time was—not so long ago—when I looked upon this young person, who, in spite of her poverty, conducted herself so steadily and diligently, really as an ornament to our town, and a pattern to its young people; but a proud spirit caused all her unhappiness. She brought her own punishment on herself, and she will still be punished, since one may presume that people will care as little about her now as she did about her old acquaintances, whom she never once invited to go and see her, when she went to live at the grand Malcolm's-Ness, and where she only sought the society of the Baroness of Segerstad and such fine people."

"Besides this," said the doctor's wife, "one can well remember the hasty and forced visits which the good lady paid here, before she went on her foreign travels; when she invited us all to go and eat cherries, when no one was at the place but poor Mrs. N——. One can but laugh to think how, when we returned, we found that she had talked us all over, this one with this and another with that! But setting all this aside, such things have been told about her husband who is gone, that she can hardly expect any one to acknowledge her."

"Any one to acknowledge her!—what do you mean by that?" asked the clergyman's wife. "Do you not think that she will be ashamed to come here, when she must know that no one would notice her? I was out there at the time of the auction, and intended to pay her a visit to console her; but although she was then in such embarrassed circumstances, she still thought fit to play the fine lady. To say that she could receive no one! That is all very well for a countess, but is too laughable for a simple lieutenant's wife, and especially from a person who formerly lived by her own labor."

Old Mistress Utter let the first storm vent itself, whilst she listened in silence. However, after it had lasted for some time uncontrolled, and without the active tongues appearing to get tired, she began, in the gentle and hearty tone which was peculiar to the good old lady: "My dear friends and kind neighbors," said she, as she held up her hand reprovingly, "what, in Heaven's name, then, are we? What surety has the Lord given us that our sails will always be filled by favorable winds, that we should so boast ourselves? 'To-day, me; to-morrow, thee,' says an old proverb. Let us be Christian-like."

"Christian?" rejoined the clergyman's wife."

"Yes, truly, my good Sophy. And I need not remind you that a minister's wife should, more than any other, be tolerant. I am convinced that if our good pastor were here, he would be of my side."

"That is quite possible, my good aunt; but I know not whether one ought to be con-considered unchristian, because one will not encourage vanity and pride."

"I believe that there is no question of either one or the other," said Mistress Utter. "Marie Louise is so thoroughly cured of her old faults, that, on the contrary, she has become one of the most humble and subdued of women. She has gone through great trials; trials that purify the mind and cause reflection. At this moment she is destitute of everything, and sits with her old mother in a desolate dwelling in the forest. Her husband died in consequence of an accident, and with his burial their last resources are exhausted."

"The poor creature! and is she, then, quite humble and contrite?"

"The poor woman! she has, then, had to kiss the rod: the punishment will have done her good."

"The poor thing! it is very well that she was accustomed to work before she became rich. Now she must resume her old habits."

"The poor unfortunate! she must now go to her fashionable friends and beg for assistance."

These were the remarks made by the circle of ladies. Old Mistress Utter continued: "She formerly belonged to this town, and it would be a beautiful thing, and a proof of the noble and good feelings that prevail here, if, forgetting these little trifles, which are not worth mentioning, the inhabitants were to invite her, in a friendly way, to return here."

"Here! and on what, in the name of Heaven, can she live?" asked the burgomaster's wife. "She lived here before, to be sure, when she was poor; but you must remember that she then had the [illegible]roness of Segerstad to assist her; and no o[illegible]an expect that we should support her, merely because the good for-nothing lieutenant happened to be a distant cousin of my husband."

"I certainly did not mean that. Marie Louise can work, as she formerly did, and why should she not get plenty of occupation from town and country? She would certainly work at a very low price, and accept any kind of work that was offered her."

"Perhaps," said the little clergyman's wife, contemptuously, "the Engineer Williamson will be renewing his addresses."

The doctor's wife burst into a laugh at this remark, so absurd did it appear to her; but the burgomaster's wife said, seriously: "It is rather malicious in you, ladies, to make such a joke. You know, as well as I, that a man in Engineer Williamson's situation, and of such a character as his, is not likely to trouble himself about her again."

Mistress Utter, to whom it was important to cut short this part of the subject, pressed them to a decision with regard to her proposal.

They were silent, and considered. It would, they thought, be very charming to go to the grand lady of Malcolm's-Ness, or to send for her to their houses, and after graciously pointing to a seat near the clock or the stove, have to say to her: "I have sent for you to know if you can make this dress for my little Alfred?" Oh, that would be a triumph quite worthy of their little town.

"I think," said the clergyman's wife, who liked to take the lead, "that they might as well come here. We can give them a little assistance. She made a collection for the poor herself when she was at the Baths, and we can subscribe together. I will ask my husband to draw up a petition."

The patience of the good Mistress Utter was nearly exhausted, but once more she armed herself with the weapon of gentle persuasion: "My dear good friends," said the worthy old lady, "when we are going to do a good action, let us do it thoroughly, and without any drawbacks. I will take it on me to write to the poor Marie Louise to propose to her to come here: but let me add, without any insincerity, that all her acquaintances in the town will receive her with the deep and true sympathy that her fate deserves. I can well imagine how thankful and touched and surprised she will be at this intelligence, which she certainly could not have expected. *But,"* added she, as a thought flashed suddenly *into her mind,* "if it is to be done, it *ought to be done* at once, before the grand people begin to do anything for her. I should be so glad to have it to say, that we were the first to act in the matter."

The right nail was hit on the head.

"I have considered the matter," said the burgomaster's wife, now raising her voice, "and have come to the same decision as my good friend Mistress Utter; and it is particularly my duty, as the wife of the principal person in the town, to send an invitation to these poor people. As well as I can remember, the people of fashion have always come to us when there was any question of a good deed that does honor to the society, and very certainly it will now be so. Madame von Walden belonged more to the nobles than to the burghers, or, rather she is a bird that fluttered between the two; but after her wings have been cut, when amongst her grand patrons, they may grow again under the shelter of the walls that will provide her with bread and a home, before the nobles find out what has become of her."

After these words of wisdom from the lips of the burgomaster's wife, no more opposition was heard. They all declared that they thought the same themselves, and should have said so, if their good hostess had not spoken first; and as one extreme lies very often near the other, they now burned with impatience to ascertain that they were not too late.

The postmaster's wife threw out a hint, that through a letter of her husband, addressed to the district newspaper, it might be represented how the former noble family of N——, who had so distinguished themselves by their good actions, were now themselves fallen a sacrifice to want, and that a helping hand might be held out to a poor and worthy widow; and it would not be the first time that the burghers of the town had given their neighbors so praiseworthy an example.

CHAPTER XXVII.

They talk and laugh, and questions ask,
And take upon themselves the task,
For thee and for thy future fate,
All things to regulate.

ADLERBETH.

"Now, then, how has your visit ended?" asked the counsellor, when the old lady, quite warm from the debate in the sessions-chamber of the burgomaster's wife, entered, and exwere mistaken. Within an hour old Mistress Utter, or rather her guests, had half the town calling to pay their visits. They could not forego such an opportunity of saying: "You are welcome back amongst us, Madame von Walden! We are, thank God! not the people to let any one feel the change in their circumstances;" or, "We are, thank God! too superior to trifles to keep in mind things that it would be wrong to mention at present," &c. &c. But it was almost a disappointment to them to find that in one important point they had miscalculated; they had, for instance, quite expected to see Marie Louise dressed in an old, short, bombazeen gown, with a rusty black shawl over her shoulders, and a yellow mourning collar of washed-out muslin—in a word, in a sort of costume which is generally worn by a poor widow in very reduced circumstances. This hope was quite defeated, since Marie Louise wore a very handsome mourning dress. The material for this, as well as the large silk shawl which she had on, had been sent to her from the owners of Kronby, immediately after the burial of her husband. It was accompanied by a kind and sympathizing letter from the baroness, in which she invited Marie Louise and her mother to spend a couple of weeks with her. In a warmly-expressed and thankful answer, she had declined this, not wishing any longer to associate with those so much above her in circumstances.

"So," said the burgomaster's wife, who heard this in a corner from the counsellor, who thought it would raise Marie Louise in her eyes; "so they really invited her! She did quite right to decline it, for it would have only been for a couple of weeks, and they would have thought that they had done enough; our town, on the contrary, does nothing by halves. But Mistress Utter, she would have done well to have laid aside the handsome mourning dress the day they came here."

"She had no other mourning," whispered the old lady; "and it would have excited remarks if she had come in a colored dress."

"That is true—but she ought not to spoil her best dress by wearing it on week days," continued the burgomaster's wife, who thought she had now a right to interfere in everything, even in the dress of Marie Louise. "I will send her, to-morrow, a black bombazine that I have left off wearing, which she can alter *and make very decent*, since, thank God! I never spare the stuff when I have a new dress made."

"And I," said the little minister's wife, "will send a black shawl and apron, which are still very good, as I only wore them two years ago, when I was in mourning for my grandmother."

After this was decided they felt more satisfied, as it was now certain that they would see the "beauty of the bow-window," the grand Madame Von Walden, in an old black bombazine gown, which was the dress most suited to her present state.

As to the way and manner in which Marie Louise comported herself on this occasion, all were contented with the unpretending simplicity and unaffected politeness that she displayed. To be sure, thought they, she might have been still more humble, and expressed more thanks; but in her eyes lay something that thanked them all, and they could not but confess that, on the whole, she behaved as was most becoming.

As they took their leave that evening, Marie Louise received a number of most pressing invitations, for they had not learned half of what they wanted to know. At last the hour came for Marie Louise, at the side of her mother, to enter again the dwelling from which, six years before, she had gone as a rich heiress, and to which she now returned so poor, that she had no chair, no table, on which she could lean for support. She tottered to the window in the bow, and sank upon her knees, thanking God that, after all these storms and trials, she had been allowed to reach the haven, which, before, had seemed so small, but now was large enough Here had her happy days of youth been passed, and here would she, perhaps, pass the whole of her future life. It seemed to Marie Louise as if a breath of heavenly peace now filled her heart; she breathed easier, she felt neither fear nor desire, neither expectation nor remembrance; all was extinguished in the calm satisfaction of the moment.

The good mother softly approached, and laid her arms round her now pacified daughter. "My child, my beloved child! Here we shall be again as we once were. Ah! how great, how good is God!"

"Yes," answered Marie Louise, as she raised her hands to heaven, to the thousand sparkling worlds in the calm blue heavens—"Yes, how good, how great! Never in my life shall I forget this evening."

The next morning Marie Louise was to experience other feelings. On this day the town exhibited its best powers in activity. Servant maids and errand boys came in dozens from all the town ladies, with the thousand necessaries which they presumed would be wanted by the new comers, in bundles, baskets, and packets of every description. Their liberality displayed itself not only in eatables, but in a quantity of more or less worn-out articles of dress, from the bombazine dress of the burgomaster's wife down to old linen. If they had had the intention to inflict a downright painful torture, they could not have discovered a better means of accomplishing it than through this feast of atonement. Marie Louise had been, it is true, as the townspeople said, stunned by misfortune; but she had still too much delicacy of feeling left, not to have preferred to work many a night long than to have to stand one whole day thanking and curtsying, and unpacking one bundle after another, without daring to reject a single article, or to show anything but the greatest gratitude and thankfulness. At last, in the evening, as the door was closed, Marie Louise, whose bitter feelings could no longer be repressed, sank on her mother's bosom, and concealed her face upon her shoulder.

"Yes, yes, my child," said the good mother as she raised her daughter's brow, which glowed with shame. "You have had to go through all this! But from to-day, I prophesy all the disagreeable will end. The people of the town have, on the whole behaved better than I even ventured to expect, and for this we have to thank our good friends, the Utters,—our true friends, who have done so much for us."

"Yes; with them it is true benevolence and sympathy," said Marie Louise: "and it does the heart good to receive proofs of their kind feelings. But mamma, the old soiled bombazine dress of the burgomaster's wife—to have to wear that——"

"My dearest child, are you, who have borne well the severest strokes of misfortune, to be overcome by the mere stings of a fly? One must remember how well intentioned all this is, even if one is aware how much a little delicacy of feeling would have raised the value of such acts. I cannot believe that you will allow this trifle to influence you. Wash the *dress, and put it on as* soon as you can. To *appease old feelings* of envy, and show yourself duly humbled, you must put on this dress when you go to the burgomaster's house."

And this was done.

Marie Louise felt it a hard struggle, it is true; but she conquered her rebellious feelings; and never did the burgomaster's wife smile with a more satisfied air, than when, holding Marie Louise by the arm, she turned her round, and exclaimed: "Bless me! how cleverly the little lady has dressed herself out in my old colors! Yes, yes, misfortune is a good schoolmaster."

* * * * *

The patience of the old counsellor and his wife was almost exhausted before the week came to an end. However, one evening, just as the old lady had said to her husband: "By this time he ought to have been here twice over," the sound of sledge bells was heard. A sledge drove up to the door, and in a few minutes Williamson stood in the middle of their little parlor, his arms around his old hostess, and she, in her turn, embracing him. Over the way it was all dark, since, as in former times, the lamp was never lighted early, and the fire burned low. But at the sound of the bells, Marie Louise had peeped behind the blind, and had seen a well-known form alight. She had never seen Williamson since the beginning of her married life, when he had paid a visit to Malcolm's-Ness; but often, during the time of her misery, she had perceived traces of, and benefited by, his near presence. Now, however, the thought of seeing him again caused her the greatest uneasiness and embarrassment, and she hoped that he might not come to them, at least not soon. Long after he had gone into the house, her eyes rested, as they often did, on the new-built white house that stood out so conspicuously from all the others. Marie Louise could never look at it without reflecting on the change that had taken place in their relative positions; and her heart beat, and her cheeks burned, when she remembered how its possessor had come as a stranger, and had settled in the town where she was at home: now he was at home and she a stranger.

Mistress Utter, who had seen that all was in darkness at her opposite neighbor's, and that Williamson could not have remarked any difference, made a sign to the counsellor to keep quiet, and much as it cost him to obey, he had not the heart to disturb her scheme.

The old lady, who was accustomed, on the evenings of Williamson's return, always to detain him for a long time down stairs in her own parlor, and who, besides, could see, this evening, in his face, that he had much to tell of old and new times in his native place, could not, however, much as she liked to hear him talk, make up her mind to postpone the discovery which awaited her little engineer, so pleaded a headache, and the want of rest, which he too must feel, for breaking up the party earlier than usual.

Williamson, who thought this was rather extraordinary, persuaded himself, however, that he should find some new piece of furniture, or some such thing in his room to surprise him, therefore took the old lady's hint in good part, and, not to try her patience, bid them good night. According to his usual custom when he entered the room, he placed the light on the table and went to the window, the curtains of which were not drawn. He looked out, and it seemed to him as if he must be either crazy or in a dream. The bow-window opposite was lighted up, and behind the blind he could perceive a shadow—the very same outline which long years before had a hundred times set his very heart in flames. After he had for a few minutes contemplated the beloved phantom—in silent fear that all might again vanish from his sight, he rushed impetuously from his room, and found his old friend without, ready to receive the due reward to her for her silence and her cunning.

"What is all this? What does this mean?" he asked, pointing to over the way.

"Ah, my dear William, be calm! They are lodgers, I suppose."

"Who? who?"

"Hey day! How hasty—you frighten me to death! They are two ladies."

"And no one else—where is then——"

"He, whom you mean," answered the old lady, in deep emotion, "is gone, gone far away; he is dead."

Williamson sank down on a chair, and leaned his head upon his hands. From his lips came but four words, but they were uttered in a tone which expressed better than words the amount and depth of his feelings. "Marie Louise—a widow!"

After the powerful and startling surprise of the first moments was somewhat allayed, the old woman, and also the old man, who had in the meantime joined them, related all that had happened and been done. First of all came the death of the lieutenant, then the letter of Mrs. N——, *then the high* session held at the house of the burgomaster, the journey of the old counsellor, the condition in which he found the two ladies, their return and reception in the town, the day of the great present-sending—all, even to the dilemma which Marie Louise had been placed in by the old bombazine dress of the burgomaster's wife, all—all was related, whilst Williamson, in a perfect fever of excitement, wept and laughed by turns, and embraced the old people, praising them for all that they had done. But the bombazine story made him quite outrageous. "They want to kill her," said he, "with their vulgar malice—the horrid old women!"

"Hush, my little William!" remonstrated the old lady; "how can you dare to call us so? I assure you that with this little act of penance all the difficulties have been smoothed over, and everything is restored to its former condition. The whole town has given proof of the most friendly intentions towards our friends."

"Yes, yes, Aunt Gretchen, that may be. I know the town and its good intentions, and value them as they deserve. But just tell me, now, how Marie Louise comports herself as a widow?"

"Quite as one would expect from a woman of her good sense and good heart. Every one can see that she does not mourn her husband's loss very deeply; but there is something so sorrowful and subdued in her whole appearance, and if she has to speak of her husband, whom she has no great reason to praise, considering that he ran through all her property, and made her unhappy in every sort of way, she yet alludes to him with expressions of love and resignation. She is certainly a perfect model of a woman."

"Yes, indeed, a perfect model!" said Williamson, as he walked hurriedly up and down the room. "I know well what she is; for many a dark and lonely night have I been out there, standing by her lowly window, and have heard how, with her own lips, she has begged and entreated him, with angel's words, to change his manner of life. And with what exemplary patience has she not borne her poverty! Never did she complain, never utter a reproach to him for having plunged her in misery. Ah! she was more than an angel; for it can cost the angels nothing to be good and pure, but she was a woman, and raised herself above all that was common and mortal. I have admired her—I have idolized her; and I will declare before the whole world that I know no one who is deserving of greater respect and esteem."

"My dear young man, now you are too open-hearted," said the old lady, smiling. "Keep these things to yourself, and let no one suspect, for Heaven's sake, that you have been spying and watching her in this way, for all the world would not judge of it as I and my good man."

Williamson blushed, and as he held out his hand to his faithful friend, he replied: "Wisely spoken, Aunt Gretchen. I am ashamed at having——but forget all about it, except what I said last; for I will maintain that she is more than an angel, and deserving of the greatest respect."

With a hearty good night the old people retired, and left Williamson to the undisturbed enjoyment of the shadow on the window-blind.

CHAPTER XXVIII.

This goes wrong, and that goes wrong,
Enough to drive one mad.
BELLMANN.

On the following morning, Williamson began his old operations with the window-curtains, which, to the great satisfaction of Mistress Utter, had been let alone for many a year.

Then leaning over the table, he enjoyed the more than ever pleasing view of Marie Louise's arm at the window, moving about as she busied herself over the plants which the Counsellor Utter had made her a present of. That hand, which raised the stems, and fastened them to their supports, was it not as white and beautiful as ever? And that face, become so pale with sorrow, did it not bear an expression of touching beauty and peace, that was more than ever charming? Many a time that morning Williamson seized his hat, in order to cross the street as formerly; but, strange to say, with a return to old times, had returned also his old shyness. He knew not whether she suspected that she was indebted to him for many alleviations of her misery, and he feared to see her, not knowing whether this sympathy—proof as it had been of undiminished tenderness—had been agreeable to her.

And now she was free!

"Free!" This word, the whole night long, had resounded in his ear; and with extraordinary accuracy, he had calculated how many days a year of widowhood contains. Unfortunately, he could not discover that it has less days than another; and a year seemed to him, just now, like a whole century.

Already had Mrs. N——, that morning, rubbed and dusted the hired furniture of their apartment twice over. Marie Louise had put on her handsome morning dress. The widow's cap became her remarkably well.

Each time that a step was heard on the stairs, the mother and daughter's eyes met. Mrs. N—— smiled; Marie Louise became red; but each time they were deceived. It was either one of the people of the house going up to the garret, or it was some message from this or that of the town ladies about a dress, a cap, or a collar, or some other article which Marie Louise had in hand for them.

It became noon. Now no one was likely to come.

"Well," said Mistress Utter, during dinner; "what have you been doing up stairs, my good William, the whole of this forenoon? I expected you would have gone out to pay a visit to some one; you certainly will go this evening?"

"Yes, I ought, indeed," said Williamson.

But whether he ought or ought not, whether he would or would not, it was not done. He dressed himself, and at least ten times took up his hat and gloves: but when he remembered that he would be obliged to say some words of condolence to Marie Louise about her widowed state, and about his own pleasure at their return to the town, all courage forsook him, and not only this evening was passed over, but many following days, without his visit being paid.

The gossips in the *sessions* parlor of the burgomaster's wife observed this, and said: "Williamson behaves in a very proper manner, in showing his opinion so plainly."

Mistress Utter said: "My good friend, you ought to be ashamed of yourself!"

Mrs. N—— said: "Can time have so changed him?"

Marie Louise said nothing.

And thus passed a whole week.

The inmates of the bow-windowed room already began to give up all thoughts of receiving a visit, when one evening, in the quiet twilight hour, when the firelight shone upon the graceful form of Marie Louise as she sat before it embroidering, the door opened softly, and a person with a large roll of paper under his arm appeared, standing irresolutely on the threshold.

"Ah, welcome, my good Engineer Williamson!" exclaimed Mrs. N——, heartily.

A light rosy cloud passed over Marie Louise's face. This name had a strange sound, and the sight of its owner a still stranger power. She was as little capable as Williamson of bringing out a single word. There was too much, far too much, in this moment for thought or feeling to find expression.

"Be so good as to sit down, my good Engineer," said Mrs. N——, who remarked that she alone must speak. Williamson bowed, and took a seat near Marie Louise, who felt deeply ashamed that she could find nothing to say to him who so well deserved a kind word from her. But it was impossible for her to thank him; for in doing so she would have acknowledged that she knew from whom all the attentions came. At last her eyes fell upon the roll of paper that he had still under his arm, and this relieved her from her embarrassment. "Ah," said she, with a smile, that had in it to Williamson something inexpressibly charming, "you have a plan I see; will the Engineer, then, trust me to do some work for him, as I formerly——"

But here Marie Louise could not get any farther; recollections closed her lips.

"I was not quite sure," answered Williamson, as he fidgeted with his roll of paper in his confusion, "whether I might venture. But the days are becoming lighter, so that probably——"

"Ah, yes, so it will," rejoined Marie Louise; "it will be so agreeable to be able to resume an old employment."

"And dare an old friend," continued Williamson, who, now the ice was broken, began to feel more courageous, "dare he venture to visit his neighbors as formerly, and give them his poor counsels?"

Marie Louise was silent; but her mother replied that, excepting Counsellor Utter and his wife, she knew no one who would be more welcome.

The lamp was lighted, and Williamson seated himself at the table near Marie Louise, who had again taken up her embroidery.

What moments now followed for him, who had so long been denied the blessedness of sitting so near her! At first he satisfied himself *with the sight of her* alone. It seemed to him as if she had become inexpressibly more beautiful; the time that she had passed in the school of misfortune had given to her features a purity and delicacy which they had not before displayed. But conversation soon flowed; and what was said bore the stamp of a heartfelt and inward blessedness.

"What a fine large house Mr. Engineer has built," said Mrs. N——; "it is quite an ornament to the town."

"That plot of ground wanted filling up," said Williamson; "and in the intervals of business, it was an agreeable amusement to have such an active employment as its superintendence. As for the garden, however, which is the best part of it, I have principally to thank the exertions of Counsellor Utter; for, next summer, I hope we shall have to admire the counsellor's taste in the laying out of the grounds.

"I thought," said Marie Louise, "that you were always absent in summer, Mr. Engineer?"

"Not quite! When a surveyor has worked a certain number of years, he can confide a great deal of his business to well-qualified assistants. I still travel a good deal, and still work in field and forest—which I shall always continue to do as long as I am capable of work, for I love activity—but I have now not less than four assistants, who help me to bear my burthen."

"And to reap the harvest also," added Mrs. N——.

"Very true, and as God has blessed it, I can even now and then take a holiday in summer time."

That Williamson's visit was renewed at proper intervals may be well imagined.

Again Marie Louise sat there coloring maps and plans; again Williamson stood behind her chair, and followed attentively each motion of her hand. And should she by chance turn her head to him as she asked a question, she encountered a glance, which, in spite of her widow's weeds, brought the blood into her cheeks. But when Williamson found himself caught in one of these looks, which could not but be considered contraband, he pretended to have business to do, and hastened quickly home. He feared so much to give Marie Louise cause to complain of any want of delicacy of feeling towards her.

"These visits," said, among themselves, the ladies of the town, "begin really to be suspicious—but our good, excellent engineer would never act so contrary to sound reason as to seriously cast his eyes on such a humble object, when he might make the best match in the town if he pleased."

"Oh, no, no," the worthy ladies consoled themselves, "it is only out of humanity, sheer humanity, and because he wishes to imitate us! He knows that she never had more need of such employment as he can give her than at present.".

But Mistress Utter patted her little engineer's cheek, and said: "Take care only, and do nothing untimely. Remember that it is a long time before the year is over; do you know that, my young gentleman?"

Williamson answered in the same sportive tone: "When the year of widowhood is over, widows can marry again. But, Aunt Gretchen, have you heard what time the law* has fixed for the beginning of a new courtship?"

"You rogue!—the law cannot think of everything. But I must then make a law, that courtship shall be followed quickly by marriage, for secret betrothals have never pleased me."

"And as little do they please me," said Williamson, "yet necessity knows no law; in April, I must go into the country."

"And you stay there until late in the autumn?" continued Aunt Gretchen.

"Yes, we shall see. Till Whitsuntide, at all events!"

"Are you crazy? Whitsuntide is only——"

"One month after Easter," interrupted Williamson; "can Aunt Gretchen reasonably desire more?"

"Yes, indeed, that I can! Don't let me see you here again until Midsummer, or I shall take it ill of you. Propriety must be attended to, my young man, or else the old woman will have nothing to do with you."

"Well, then, not till Midsummer."

When Williamson took leave in April, he made his neighbors promise to look upon his garden as their own; but he also exacted a promise from Aunt Gretchen that they should not be allowed to go into the new house. Mistress Utter guessed why this was not to be, and guessed also when they were to be shown the inside of it. Therefore she gave the required promise, and kept it too.

Behind the curtain stood Marie Louise watching the departure of Williamson. Her mother was at the window, and received his cordial farewell greeting. How different was it from that which on a former occasion she received on the same spot!

"It will seem a long time until we see him again," said the mother, looking towards her daughter; but the latter avoided her eyes, and sat down again to her work.

As the spring advanced, Marie Louise walked by the side of the counsellor up and down the gravel paths of the new garden, and enjoyed a feeling of happiness and peace that she had fancied to be gone for ever. With each morning sun that rose upon her life, her heart became more and more expanded. The dark clouds rolled away, and left behind a remembrance that was sorrowful, yet without bitterness; for past misfortunes, if only accompanied by a peaceful conscience, yield a blessedness almost as great as joy, although a trembling tone of sadness be mingled with it.

It was the greatest delight of Marie Louise to be able to sit at sunset in the shadow of the counsellor's espaliers, and look down upon the flowing river which formed one of the garden's boundaries. It was all so sweetly peaceful and harmonious. And the possessor of all this was shortly expected home, and then how would it all be? At this thought, which returned so often against her will, came a long repelled feeling back into her heart. She forced herself, however, to forget this subject which so confused her thoughts, and led her into dreaming, at times when she was obliged to work.

Midsummer was already some time past, and yet Williamson had not returned, and Mistress Utter began to fear the arrival of a letter, "in the name of humanity," to announce another illness, when at last the engineer arrived, fresh and well, and sunburnt, but in a very bad humor, because his business had detained him three days beyond the time he had fixed for his return home.

"You do not come a day too late, my good friend," said Aunt Gretchen, to console him, "since you have still, you know, a long time to wait."

But this well-meant consolation of the old lady was like a drop of water on a flaming fire. A few days stolen from expected bliss seemed an irreparable evil, and could only be atoned for by now losing no second of time.

"For Heaven's sake, do not run away again like a madman!" entreated Mistress Utter.

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*It would appear by this, that in Sweden a law exists to prevent the marriage of a widow before the expiration of a year.—Tr.

"You are as dusty as if you had been spending the night on the high road."

"That I did do," said Williamson, as he ran up stairs to his own room; for Aunt Gretchen was right, he must make something of a toilette, let him be ever in such haste.

"Where, in the name of goodness, are you going, mamma?" said Marie Louise, and tried to detain her mother as she was about to leave the room.

"How strange you are, my dear child!" answered Mrs. N——. "Where should I go but into the kitchen, to look after my chocolate?" And, thanking God that she had the same custom for it as formerly, she went away to her occupation, without Marie Louise having courage to own to her that she wanted her presence.

About this time Marie Louise had worn widow's weeds nearly six months. It was the first time that, without exactly knowing why, she had noticed the circumstance, and that she had, perhaps unconsciously made a change in her dress. The warm summer's day, and the warm black dress, were ill suited to each other. She put on, this afternoon, a muslin dress, which was suited for half-mourning, which she had lately remodelled. Perhaps she had never in her life felt more embarrassed than when her mother, putting her head into the room to look at the clock, called out in surprise: "You are not going out in that dress, my dear child!"

"No, mamma, I am not going out."

"I thought so, or you would have been differently dressed."

"Am I never to wear a lighter dress? I find the black one so warm."

Mrs. N—— shut the door, without giving an answer.

Marie Louise opened it again. "Is there anything remarkable in my wearing this gown, dear mamma?"

"Not at all, my child. You may, from this time, begin to make a little change in your mourning. That is all very well at home—provided you remember that nothing else can or ought to be changed."

This time it was Marie Louise who shut the door, and she sat down in silence to her work. Half an hour passed, during which her needle was drawn in and out of her embroidery, whilst her eyes glanced occasionally through the curtains, and across the street. On a sudden she became red, and pale, and again red: *some one* came down the steps of the opposite house. Marie Louise stood up, and thought she would go into the next room to her mother, but sat down again on the chair, however, before she could act upon the thought. The whole of her embroidery apparatus fell to the ground, and Marie Louise was busied in picking up muslin, cotton-ball, scissors, and all, when the door opened suddenly, and Williamson stood by her side. He looked as if he would that moment have pressed her to his heart, and as if only the greatest effort enabled him to conquer the impetuosity of his feelings.

"Welcome home, Mr. Engineer!" said Marie Louise, as she tried to recover her composure. "It must have been very warm to-day for travelling."

"Warm? Oh, that is saying too little! The sun is burning, the sand of the road is burning, everything is burning hot today."

"But here we are nice and cool," rejoined Marie Louise, yet without one of those bewitching and coquettish smiles, that in former days would have accompanied a remark that admitted of a double meaning! Now, on the contrary, she looked as if she meant neither more nor less than she said.

"I should like it better, were it less cool," said Williamson, "for strong contrasts are always painful to me, and have a painful effect on my mind."

"Mamma will certainly be here directly. Will Mr. Engineer in the meantime——" her eyes were turned to an empty chair.

"Ah, I entreat you, speak less like a stranger to me! If I only might say what I wish, I would remind you how cold words of this kind sound between persons whose acquaintance is as old as ours. I wish I was not obliged to say Madame von Walden; I wish I was not obliged to be called Mr. Engineer—these names sound deathly cold."

"But custom, form——" stammered out Maria Louise.

"Customs and forms! Ah, they are of little weight compared to——"

"No," said she, interrupting him in evident agitation, "they are not of little weight—recollect yourself——"

"Oh, be assured that I remember everything! One is not likely to forget what one is daily reminding oneself of; but one cannot submit for an eternity to customs and forms. I long inexpressibly for the moment when one may set these aside, as a token that the heart has greater claims than all the forms in the world."

"For Heaven's sake! do not speak so," entreated Marie Louise, unable any longer to restrain her feelings; "I earnestly beg of you to say no more."

"Ah, Marie Louise, must I even now be forbidden to speak?" Williamson took her hand in his, and his looks appealed to her remembrance.

"It is quite different now," answered she, softly.

"Yes, quite, quite different!" repeated he, "and therefore, my dear, my ever-beloved Marie Louise, must not be harder towards me than my own fate has been! I do not ask, indeed, that to-day, before the whole world, I may be able to announce that this woman, whom I have adored for seven years, for whose happiness I would have sacrificed my heart's blood, for whom my tears have been wrung—Oh, God grant that I may never have to shed such again—this woman is now forever mine; mine to reward me for all my sorrow, mine that I enjoy the highest, truest bliss that life can give. No! beloved, sweetest Marie Louise, I do not desire to be able to say all that. But here, in your own home, I may say it, here, where there is no listening ear of envy; here, where I can hear you, without having to fear that a single word of yours might be taken from me by cold and strange lips. Speak, oh speak! are not all trials over now, all cares ended? Is not Marie Louise mine own?"

The feeling of blessedness was too great to find room in her heart—it took refuge in her eyes. Marie Louise had, it is true, still some power over those interpreters of the heart—the lips, but over her looks she had no longer any control. Williamson saw the tears tremble in her eyelids, and bright clouds flame into her cheeks. Yet, as he feared to make the same mistake again, as that which he had six years before, he dared not translate this speech. He was determined to have a more audible proof, and would perhaps have received one, if at the same moment Mrs. N—— had not entered, with her arms full of chocolate cakes, greeting him with a hearty welcome.

Williamson, who had hitherto been always very friendly and polite to the worthy lady, with whom in her troubles, he had had so much intercourse, wished her now, if not very far off, at least back again in her kitchen. But Mrs. N—— had finished her business for the day, and remained there the whole evening, to Williamson's inexpressible vexation.

"Well, now, for God's sake, is not everything settled yet?" asked Aunt Gretchen, as Williamson came back, and she saw at a glance that the goal was not quite reached.

"Settled? oh, it will never be settled! But, to-morrow, dear Aunt Gretchen, you must invite them to take coffee in my garden, and THEN!" Williamson pressed the old woman's hand, and said, "Good-night."

On the following day, Williamson was constantly busy in his new house; but when the afternoon arrived, he assisted Aunt Gretchen to arrange the table for coffee in the little bower close to the flowing river. A thousand times did his thoughts picture to him the things that might occur that evening; but in spite of such flights among the clouds, he lent an attentive ear to everything within and without doors. If fate did not bring him another disappointment, but should all go according to his wishes, the little festival should end within the new house, in his favorite apartment in the wing.

The clock had struck the important hour of four, the unfailing hour appointed for coffee-drinkings in all little towns, when the garden door was thrown wide open by Williamson himself, and the counsellor, with Mrs. N—— upon his arm, and Mistress Utter, with Marie Louise leaning on hers, entered his paradise.

"Bless me, what a display the engineer makes!" said Mrs. N——, as she perceived the silver coffee-pot and other luxurious articles, which shone so brightly in the golden sunshine. "This is one of your bachelor services, is it?"

Marie Louise contented herself with admiring the beautiful flowers that diffused their odor from two crystal vases.

"Thank you," said the counsellor, patting her on the shoulder. "My little flower flatters the gardener, whilst the mamma—— well, well, my dear neighbor, I will say nothing more," added the old man, jokingly.

Mistress Utter sat down at the table, and began to preside as hostess, and then came her turn to have her coffee praised, which every one thought incomparable.

In happy officiousness, and as blessed as a man can be on the day when, like Elijah, he hopes to pass from earth to heaven, Williamson went from one to the other, and every glance betrayed his feelings. After the coffee-happiness, and she threw herself, as if seeking a shelter, on the bosom of the old man. William, on the contrary, exclaimed joyfully, as he shook him heartily by the hand: "My good uncle has certainly forgotten the joy of such a moment, when he has had the heart to interrupt it!"

"And what if the burgomaster's wife or the postmaster's wife had interrupted it? You ungrateful fellow, to receive the man whom you have to thank for your happiness in such an unpolite manner!"

"That is true, so I will withdraw my words. And now I must go and tell Aunt Gretchen," and down the stairs and over the street he flew.

Not more than half a second was he in passing between these two women whom he loved so well, and then throwing his arms around his dear, his mother-like "Aunt Gretchen," he embraced her so closely, that the old lady exclaimed, "Let me go, let me go, you madman! No need to ask now if all be settled; but here stands one who has a right to take a part in the affair."

"My mother, my beloved mother!" said Williamson, taking respectfully the hand of Mrs. N——, with whom he was not so familiar, "dare I venture to hope that the mother of Marie Louise will become mine also?"

"With my whole heart! It was always my dearest wish. I need not say, make Marie Louise happy, for I know she could not be happy with any one else!"

And now Williamson danced again around the two ladies, for grave and solemn as the occasion required he could not become. But Mrs. N—— checked his delirious joy a little, when, with a warning voice, she said, "Hush, hush! Remember that the betrothal must remain a profound secret. Do not forget that Marie Louise must do nothing inconsistent with her present garb on ——"

"Ah, yes, I know it well," rejoined Williamson; "and no one shall say that I am not propriety itself. But now I must return to my betrothed."

And on the same evening, Marie Louise, under the escort of her mother and Mistress Utter, wandered arm-in-arm, with Williamson, over the new house. On this occasion Williamson was very naturally not on earth, but high in the heavens, and Marie Louise hovered somewhere between the two. She looked at everything in a sort of confused whirl; but when at last they reached the "wing room," which was more particularly destined for her, her feelings were aroused to the deepest and holiest gratitude. This "wing room" contained the elegant and costly furniture which, when still unmarried, she had purchased for a favorite room at Malcolm's-Ness. Ah, on this very sofa, how many a time had she sat and thought, and thought again, on him who was now by her side? A thousand times had she thought and wished that she could only become poor again, and return to the same circumstances under which they had parted; and now all lay behind her in the distance; trials and storms had come to an end, and they were again united. But was it not a dream? Was, indeed, such blessedness possible on earth? "Oh, God!" said she, with a sigh, as she leant her brow upon his shoulder, "I know not how one can survive such moments as these!"

"Now that I have heard this confession from your lips, my Marie Louise!" said Williamson, looking into her deep eyes, "I have no reason to complain any more of my six years of probation. This hour, and all future hours, could not be paid for with less!"

"And what were you not doing for me during all that time! Oh, William! I never could tell you before what I suspected—but now there are to be no more secrets between us."

"Do not remind me of it, my beloved," said he, and a shade of sorrow passed over his features; "that time, alas!—but no more of it. If ever a woman had a tender and loving husband, yours shall be one, were it only on account of the view from this window," and he pointed to the bow-window which they could see nearly opposite, "which was once so much to me, for I had no hope, no consolation, but the memory of the past."

"And I," added Marie Louise, as she followed the direction of his eyes, "I thank God that this house was built here, and that this beloved little room, which I shall choose for my every-day sitting-room, is so situated, that, in my daily prayers, I can look across to that lowly roof where my fate was decided, and where, through my own sad fault, I brought on myself years of misery; and where, too, my repentance and tears have, I trust, washed away the stains which this fault may have left behind."

Marie Louise spoke these words in deep emotion, and Williamson replied to them only by a close embrace.

"Mr. Engineer!" resounded the voice of Carl, at the door.

Carl had, from a brisk servant lad, become a most gentlemanly valet, and was still a great favorite with his master.

"What is the matter?" inquired Williamson, who, as Carl could observe, was not particularly pleased at his appearing at this moment.

"Mr. Pellander is out there, and I cannot get rid of him."

"Brother Will'son—your obedient servant—brother Will'son!" was heard, through the half-opened door, in Pellander's well-known voice. "Brother of my heart, Will'son, as I am in the town, I must—Ah! visitors here—the good lady, who, thank God, looks so pretty, that no one would ever think of the fall of snow last year, although, it must be said, it fell pretty thick. Well, now, may one congratulate—may one congratulate?"

"A half year too soon, Uncle Pellander," replied Williamson. "But if, on the honor of an advocate, uncle will keep our secret, I will invite him to the wedding that is to take place all in good time; and I swear, in the presence of my adored bride, to make him a present, on that day, of a whole dozen bottles of the finest rum, in remembrance of our expedition to the island of Säfö."

"Ah, brother Will'son, brother Will'son, and you, my good little lady, who will become, in good time, Mrs. Will'son, whereby—I think it my duty to say it openly—you will lose nothing; as long as a drop remains in the dozen bottles, will I drink to the health of you both."

"But, my good Mr. Pellander," said Marie Louise, "do not forget that you are on your honor; but I know that Mr. Pellander is very careful."

"Oh! madame, madame, my little, good lady, Mrs. Will'son—Mrs. Engineer, I ought to say—I have always made it my duty to keep secrets! But I did not come here without having a little business to do. A certain thing—that is to say, article—as you please to call it, has come into my possession for a second time; in what manner, it is quite unnecessary to relate. I had the intention to offer it for sale to brother Will'son; but, as I see that affairs here have taken this pretty turn, and considering that little letter which the good lady—yes, yes, be so good as to *look this way*, my lady—it is my full intention to present this little valuable as a gift to the bride of my dear friend and brother, and I only ask, in return, to be considered as a family friend of this worthy couple."

To the astonishment of Williamson and Marie Louise, Pellander drew forth the golden snuff-box, which, during Von Walden's illness, had a second time been disposed of, and he placed in her hands the once cherished keepsake, now so closely connected with the events of her past life.

"How, for Heaven's sake!" cried Williamson; "my poor Marie Louise, has this friend again——"

"Oh, hush, hush!" she implored, blushing; "but Mr. Pellander, that is impossible."

"Oh, your obedient servant, your obedient servant! I have had many a good bit of business with the good lady, and do it out of friendship for brother Will'son, my dear friend, who, as the good lady very likely knows, was the giver of the snuff-box the first time, although the rogue made me write the letter that the lady was so grateful for."

The glance which Marie Louise exchanged Williamson, convinced him, that this information was not new to her; and he said joyfully: "Let it be as Uncle Pellander wishes! But I beg my good uncle to remember, that I should never have permitted my future wife to accept such a costly present from him, if I did not wish to testify my grateful respect to him for the kind consideration my Marie Louise received from him at a time when he was concerned in her affairs; and secondly, were I not convinced that this present, which one would have been frightened to receive from another, to the rich Pellander is a mere trifle. You must know, my love, that a person like the renowned legal agent and commissioner, Josias Pellander, will, in the next profitable concern that he undertakes, earn twice the value of this."

"Upon honor, brother Will'son," answered Pellander, much flattered, "you do not say wrong! Brother Will'son has always judged me rightly; for, without boasting, I consider it always my duty to pay myself well for my time and trouble on all occasions."

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There was a great disturbance, a perfect uproar, when, at the end of the year of widowhood, the betrothal of Williamson and Marie Louise was publicly announced.

The town had never expected this. They could not, indeed, find a fit name to apply to such conduct; for there was not a single mother in the place who had not cast her nets to catch the handsome and wealthy engineer, who, after all, had nothing to do with their good town, and now, like a fool, was going to unite himself to a mere beggar, who had to thank the kindness of the town ladies for her very maintenance.

At first there was not a single lady who did not resolve that nothing should induce her to go to the wedding; but the nearer the important day approached, the more they began to repent of this decision, and to consider that it would be better not to display their vexation so openly; besides this, it would be a sin to vex the poor things so much.

Meantime, the last possible day for the invitations to appear arrived, and yet they came not; for Marie Louise had determined that the ceremony should be performed in the greatest privacy possible; and as for the town, the dinner which was given the next day followed by the customary ball, was so brilliant and well arranged, that all parties were reconciled.

"Yes," said some of our town ladies, as they went about calling on each other to talk it over, "she was really very amiable and agreeable, little Mrs. Williamson, and there was something, if you observed, quite humble in her deportment."

"To be sure," rejoined another, with a significant smile, "we have never heard that she has a bas memory, and it is not so long since that she found her way back again entirey through our compassion."

"At all events," said the clergyman's wife, in conclusion, "she belongs no longer to the aristocratic party, but is quite as much of a citizen as ourselves, and it can never be a question as to who she will associate with or not, now that we are disposed to be on a familiar footing with her."

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The town had never another opportunity of complaining of Marie Louise, although all things returned to their former course. Without the other ladies being conscious of it, she formed again the principal ornament of their society, in manners and dress, as well as in beauty, and became their model for imitation as far as this was possible.

On a beautiful day in Spring, about a year after Williamson's marriage, a little festival in honor of a christening was celebrated in his family. The mother-in-law and Aunt Gretchen were immensely busy in every direction, whilst Williamson, wild with joy, was singing and running in and out of the house, but every now and then paying a visit to the wing-room, where sat Marie Louise leaning back on the sofa-cushions, and with her feet resting on a stool that he busied himself every ten minutes in adjusting.

On one of these occasions, Marie Louise expressed a wish that he would bring her a parcel out of a drawer in the inner room. Williamson turned everything over and upside down in two or three of the drawers without finding what he fancied must be the right thing, and at last, unlocking the top drawer, he removed a white napkin which covered its contents, and exclaimed, in surprise: "What, in the name of goodness, my love, is this?" and going to the door of the room where his wife sat, "What can you possibly want with these rags there?"

Marie Louise made signs that he should bring them to her, and he presently stood by her sofa with an old stained and shabby bombazeen dress in one hand, and a rusty old black shawl in the other; then, beginning to suspect the meaning of it all, he rested his eyes with inexpressible tenderness on his adored wife.

"These rags, as you call them, dear William," said she, in deep emotion, "I received as a gift of charity when I returned here destitute of almost everything. The day I received them was perhaps the most humiliating in my life; but in order to keep up the remembrance of it, and to have ever before my eyes a wholesome companion, I preserve these things in the same chest of drawers that I keep all the dress and ornaments that you have lavished on me; and if ever I feel tempted to pride or presumption, I open that drawer, the contents of which have more eloquence than all the sermons in the world. I mean, some day, my dear William, to show them to our daughter, and I hope that the moral that lies in these old rags will preserve her from all her mother's faults."

"God grant," said Williamson, much touched, as he threw his arms around his wife, "that she may inherit all her mother's virtues, and I can wish her no better portion! Oh, my beloved wife—for such moments the earth is too narrow!"

"Why speak of earth," said she, smiling

archly. "Do I not see by your eyes that you are above the clouds?"

"And I say that you are both in the clouds," exclaimed Mistress Utter, as she appeared at the door, "for here I may stand and talk myself hoarse, before I even make myself heard, and before you will let me tell you that the clergyman is come, and all is ready for the ceremony which is to give us another little Marie Louise."

END OF MARIE LOUISE.

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